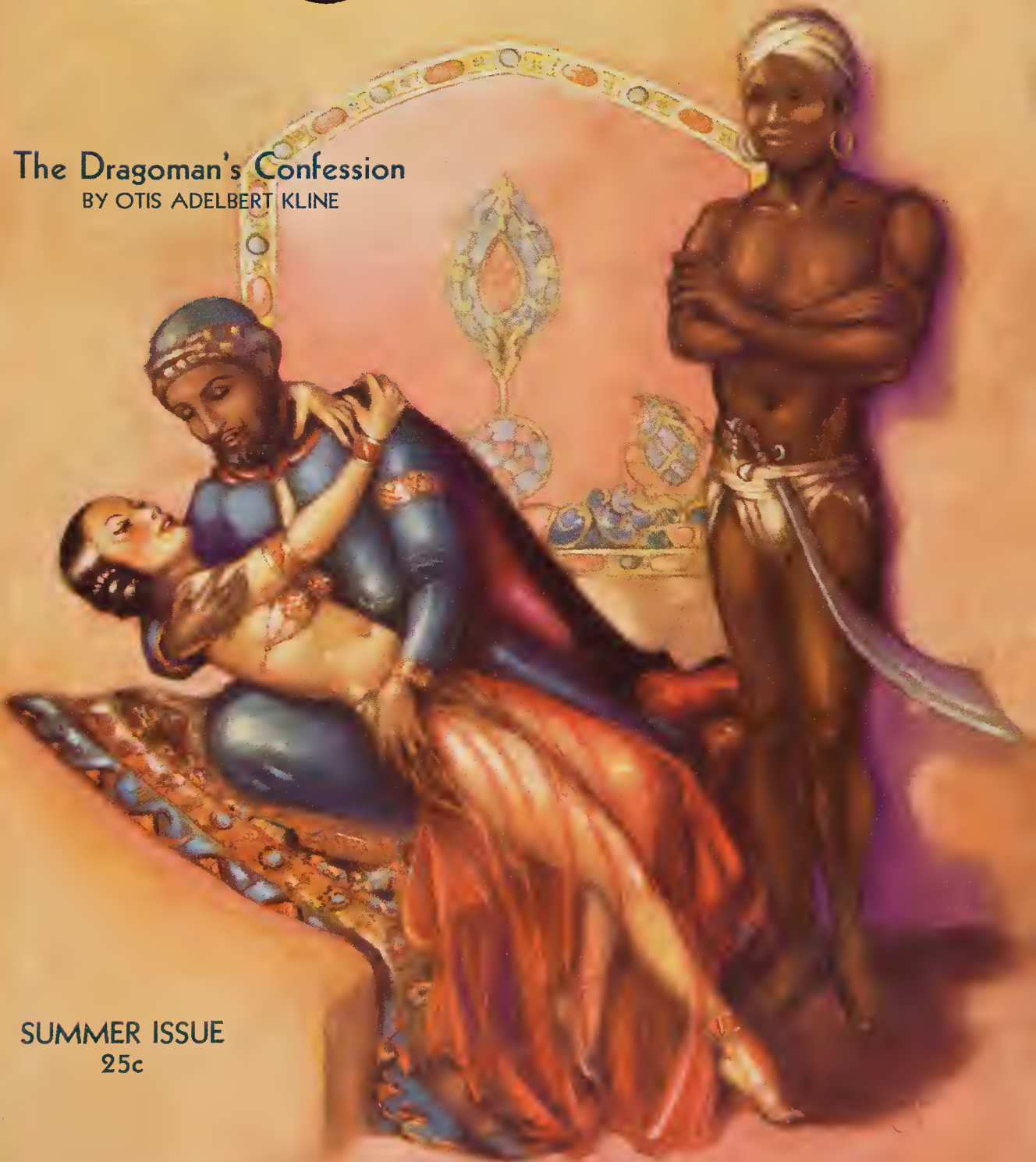


ALL STORIES COMPLETE

# Oriental *STORIES*

The Dragoman's Confession  
BY OTIS ADELBERT KLINE



SUMMER ISSUE  
25c

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1932

ORIENTAL STORIES

Vol. 2, No. 3—25c

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FAIRNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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# The Dragoman's Confession

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

*A smashing action-adventure story about an Arabian dragoman's love  
for a beautiful Chinese girl*

THE Wailing Wall of the Jews, *effendi*, is best seen when the shadows begin to lengthen, and not in this midday heat. Yet if you insist—No? Well then, here is the coffee shop of Silat, master brewer of *quahwah*, and I have bethought me of a wondrous adventure of mine, which I never before have related to mortal man.

Is not this shade refreshing after the heat and dust of the street, and is it not better far to be seated on this cushioned *diwan* than tramping beneath the blazing sun?

Ho, Silat! Bring two *narghiles*, heaped with your finest Persian tobacco, and scented with essence of orange flowers. And prepare for us coffee, black as the heel of an Abyssinian eunuch, bitter as aloes and quinine, and hot as the pitch in the cauldron of Jan ibn Jan, Sultan of all evil *jinn*.

The tale, *effendi*, is one which I would hesitate to tell to any but you, a confession of an indiscretion of the days of my youth, when—Allah forgive me!—I transgressed the law of the Koran. It is a story which I should not like to repeat to one who, like myself, is of the Faithful. But you, who have an understanding heart, and a sympathy for all races and creeds, will understand.

Once I told you a tale of a rose, *effendi*—of Selma, beautiful Rose of Mosul. I will now relate to you a story of a lily, a tiger lily from far Cathay. Was it not Sayyidna Isa himself who said that even the glory of the great Suleiman Baalshem, Lord of the Name, was as nothing compared to the splendor of the lily? Con-

sider, then, the golden beauty of the tiger lily, with its slender throat and its graceful curves, greater than that of all other lilies. Reflect on this, *effendi*, and you may be vouchsafed some slight conception of the glorious perfection of a slender, black-eyed maiden of Cathay, who rightfully bore the name, Tiger Lily.

I pray you, *effendi*, for the purpose of this story, think not of me as the bent and wrinkled graybeard who sits before you, but as I looked in the days of my youth—tall and straight as a young pine, strong and brave as a tiger, and handsome as the bright moon of Ramazan.

I have told you, *effendi*, of my great love for Selma Hanoum, and of the magnificent palace we maintained in Mosul. So deep was our affection, each for the other, that it seemed that she but lived to please me, and I, her.

One day as I was strolling through the *souk*, I passed the hidden slave mart where I had purchased Selma in defiance of the Pasha's eunuch. It brought back a flood of memories, so, recalling the password, I made my way through the shop of the rug vender, which veiled the courtyard where this secret traffic was conducted.

I SAW that I had arrived late, as most of the business of the day had been transacted. Many buyers were about to depart with their purchases, young and old, male and female, white, yellow, brown and black. But one slave remained to be sold, a young maid of Cathay. Her master, a gray-bearded Pathan, helped her to mount the platform, and stood by while the auctioneer lifted the





*"Ahmed roared out: 'Wallah! Look where you are going!'"*

concealing cloak from her shapely shoulders, the better to display her charms to prospective purchasers.

"Ho, Defenders of the Faith," he cried. "Behold! Praise God for permitting your eyes to see this lovely flower from far Cathay. Lo Foo Goak, the Tiger Lily, a princess in her own right, only daughter of a great Chinese war-lord. Worth her weight in gold. What am I offered?"

A beetle-browed Kurd at my left bid fifty piasters, which was, of course, only meant to start the bidding, as her master would scarcely have parted with a paring of her nail for so low a price.

The girl was undeniably beautiful by

any standard. There was just enough tilt to her heavy-lidded almond eyes to give here a piquant expression. Her nose was small and straight, and her lips were twin rose-petals of delight. The clinging, translucent silk of her Chinese costume revealed firm, virginal breasts, a slender waist, and limbs that were marvels of grace and perfection.

The bidding swiftly grew louder and the bidders more clamorous as they began to realize, one after another, the tremendous worth of the slave-girl who stood before them. Of course, none believed that she was a princess, any more than did I, who knew the extravagant lengths to

which auctioneers would go to dispose of their merchandise. But all knew the great market value of such unusual grace and beauty.

I stood idly looking on, taking no great interest in the proceedings, when the thought occurred to me that Selma Hanoum would be pleased with the gift of such a slave-girl. I took inventory of my gold, and found that I had about seventy pounds Turkish. The bidding had, by that time, reached fifty pounds, or five thousand piasters.

"I am bid but five thousand piasters for this Virgin of Paradise, this daughter of a Chinese prince, stolen from the garden of her father's palace by a Mongol raider, and sold by him to Yusuf ben Ali, the Pathan merchant prince, for a lakh of rupees. If a single para less than that sum is bid, he will take her to Samarkand, where beauty such as hers is appreciated."

The bidders had, by this time, narrowed down to two, a wrinkled *shaykh*, and a blubber-lipped Moor, black as ebony and ugly as a baboon. With much squabbling back and forth, they were raising each other's bids, ten piasters at a time.

"Six thousand piasters," I said.

Both stared at me, as if disgusted with my lack of business acumen, but the auctioneer fairly beamed.

"Six thousand piasters," he cried. "Who will bid seven?"

The *Magrhebi* raised my bid another ten piasters, and the *shaykh* raised his bid another ten. I grew impatient of their haggling.

"Seven thousand," I cried.

The two bidders glared at me, then looked sympathetically at each other.

"By Allah! Such bidding is outlandish," muttered the *Magrhebi*.

"*Ayewab!* It is ruinous," agreed the *shaykh*. "I am through."

"Not I," announced the *Magrhebi*.

Then he shouted: "Seven thousand and ten piasters."

Hastily I rechecked the contents of my purse. This was more money than I had with me.

"I am bid seven thousand and ten piasters," cried the auctioneer. "Who will raise the bid?"

I shrugged my shoulders, and turned away. Then I heard a cry from the girl, which caused me to look back. She had drawn a knife from beneath her garments, and now held it poised above her bosom. "Dare to sell me to that filthy Blackamoor, O Pathan," she cried, "and I will slay myself."

The *Magrhebi* grinned. "*Wah!*" he exclaimed. "She is a little tigress. But fear not, O Pathan, I can tame her." In his hand he held a heavy, three-lashed *kurbaj* of twisted rhinoceros hide. With the quickness of a darting serpent, he struck, and the knife flew from the girl's fingers and tinkled on the flagstones of the courtyard.

"Seven thousand and ten," intoned the auctioneer. "Who will bid eight thousand?"

Again the *Magrhebi* grinned, and looked about him. Then he said: "There are no more bidders, auctioneer. She is mine. And here is your gold." He tossed a bag onto the platform, and reached up to help the girl down. But she drew back from him. "I will not be slave of yours, O great African ape," she said, defiantly.

With a frown, the *Magrhebi* swung his *kurbaj* and flicked her bare shoulder, raising three red welts. "Come quickly," he commanded, "or my three little black snakes will bite harder, and the next time they will draw blood."

"Never!"

He drew back his whip for a blow, but the girl did not flinch. She regarded him with a look of haughty disdain.

Again he swung the *kurbaj*. But by that time I had come up to him. Before he could lash her a second time I wrenched the whip from his grasp.

He turned to me, an evil look in his eyes, and laid his hand on his simitar. "So, my young cockerel, you would interfere between a man and his slave. Give me back my whip."

"Here it is," I replied, and lashed him across the face.

He whipped out his simitar, at this, but I brought the heavy butt of the whip down on his wrist, so numbing it that the weapon dropped from his fingers. Then I jerked his bag of gold from the hands of the astonished auctioneer, and hurled it into the *Magrhebi's* midriff with such force that he doubled up and fell on his face, while the coins from the bursted bag rolled all about him.

"Now take your gold, and get out," I told him, "or your three little black snakes shall sup on the blood of their master."

**H**ALF dazed, and completely cowed, he got to his knees and whined: "Do not whip me, master. I but jested, my lord. I would not have struck the girl again."

I tossed the whip to him, and turned to confront the astounded auctioneer, and the enraged Yusuf ben Ali, the girl's Pathan master.

"By God and again by God!" raged the Pathan. "How dare you ruin my business? I will go before the Pasha. I will have you beaten with palm rods. You——"

"Enough, *sidi*," I interrupted. "I will pay you eight thousand piasters for the girl. Does that suffice you?"

"Money talks," he replied. "Let me see your gold."

"Here are seven thousand piasters," I said, tossing him my purse. "Count them. And here," drawing a blazing ruby from

my finger, "is a ring worth twenty thousand. I will leave it with our friend the auctioneer as surety, and he will pay you the other thousand."

The auctioneer examined the ring, a present to me from Selma Hanoum which I valued very highly, and with which I would not have consented to part permanently for any sum. Yusuf ben Ali counted the gold over twice. "It is correct," he said, finally.

"I will pay you the other thousand and keep the ring as surety," the auctioneer told him.

"I'll call for the ring this afternoon," I said. "Have it ready for me."

I helped the girl down from the platform. Then she adjusted her cloak and veil and we walked out, passing the blubber-lipped *Magrhebi* as he crawled about on his hands and knees, muttering to himself and retrieving his gold, past the staring crowd of purchasers and slaves, through the shop of the rug merchant, and into the street.

I swiftly led the way to the palace of Selma Hanoum, hoping she would be pleased with this beautiful gift I had brought her, and anxious to see the look on her face when I should unveil the gorgeous slave-girl from Cathay.

But as soon as I entered the *salamlik*, I knew that something was wrong. The *bowab* was not at the door, and in the rooms beyond I heard the women keening.

Completely forgetting the little slave-girl, I rushed into the *majlis*. There on a *diwan* lay my beautiful Selma, her women wailing around her.

In an instant I was at her side. On her face was the pallor of death, and there hovered about her the faint odor of crushed peach kernels.

"Selma!" I cried. "Selma, beloved!"



I touched her brow. It was cold as marble.

"She has been received into the mercy of Allah, *sidi*," sobbed one of her women.

## 2

**I** KNELT there beside the mortal remains of my beloved, too stunned with grief to know or care what went on around me. Presently, however, I became aware that some one was speaking to me. It was the little slave-girl I had just purchased. She had taken a small piece of pastry from a tray that stood on a near-by taboret, and was holding it before me.

"Do you recognize this odor, master?" she asked.

I sniffed it. "Bitter almonds. Cherry laurel," I said. "What does it matter?" Having once been an *attar*, I recognized the familiar odor of a common flavoring essence.

"Might it not also be poison—prussic acid?" she asked.

True. Blinded by my grief, I had not even thought of this. It must be poison, for Selma had evidently been in perfect health when I had left her a few hours before.

I got to my feet. "Who brought these pastries to the mistress?" I asked.

An old slave-woman answered. "I brought them, *sidi*."

"And where did you get them?"

"The new cook made them, my lord."

The new cook! This brought suspicions. The day before, our old cook and his helper had left us to take employment with Ahmed Aga, one of the most prosperous of the dignitaries of Mosul, who had offered them ridiculously high wages. Shortly thereafter, two other men who had applied for their positions had been employed. I had not liked the looks of either of them at the time, but Selma had taken them on trial.

"Where is Musa, the eunuch?" I asked.

"Here, my lord." Musa parted the hangings of the rear door of the *majlis*, and stepped within the room.

"Bring the new cook and his helper into the *salamlik*," I commanded.

"Harkening and obedience, *sidi*."

I went into the *salamlik*. Presently Musa entered with the new cook, a short, rotund, greasy-faced *Turki* named Sufeyd.

"Where is your helper?" I asked.

"He has gone to the *souk*, *sidi*," replied Sufeyd, "to buy meat and vegetables."

"So? Who made the pastry that was served to your mistress today?"

"I made it, my lord."

"And what strange flavor did you add to it?"

"I added naught but essence of almonds," he replied, sullenly. "My helper obtained it for me. He told me a few drops in the filling of each cake would give them a delicious flavor, thus pleasing my mistress with my work."

"Here is the essence, *sidi*," said Musa. He drew a small phial from his clothing and handed it to me. I drew the cork, and a whiff convinced me that it was indeed prussic acid.

"So your helper gave you this poison," I said. "A likely story, yours. A cook taking advice from his helper."

"Poison! *Sidi*, I swear to you by my head and beard, by the tombs of my forefathers, that I knew it not. *Sidi*, have mer——"

He got no further. Blinded by grief and rage, and thoroughly disbelieving the story of this villainous-looking rascal, I had whipped out my simitar. A swift, sure blow, and his head flew from his shoulders, cutting off his speech for ever.

A moment later, I repented my rash act, when repentance came too late. I reflected that Sufeyd might have been telling the

truth after all, that he might have been the dupe of some one else. But, assuming that he had not used the poison innocently, thinking it a harmless flavoring essence, and had been in a plot with others, I had for ever sealed the only lips which could tell me who those others might be.

As I stood there thus, with the poison phial in one hand and the bloody simitar in the other, the front door was suddenly flung open, and Daoud Aga, the *Yuz-bashi*, or Captain of the *Hylas*, the Turkish Irregular Cavalry, entered, followed by a file of soldiers.

"Hah!" he cried. "I am sent to arrest you for one murder, and find that you have committed two. By slaying your accomplice you have saved the headsman one stroke, but he shall not be cheated of the other."

"What do you mean? Who sent you?" I asked.

"I mean that you are under arrest for having ordered the poisoning of your wife, Selma Hanoum. His Excellency the Pasha sent me. If you have any further questions, let them wait until you stand before His Excellency."

## 3

**H**AFIZ PASHA, supreme ruler of the Pashalik of Mosul, glared at me as I was brought before him. I could see that, in his mind, I was convicted before being tried. Beside him sat Ahmed Aga, the man who had hired our cook and helper the day before. He was a handsome and extremely vain fellow of about my own age, and affected a short, crisply curled black beard.

"O miserable and ungrateful wretch of a *Badawi*," said the Pasha. "Dare you deny the heinous crime of which you have been accused?"

"I have not been faced with an accuser, as yet, Your Excellency," I reminded him.

"You will face him soon enough!" He turned to a soldier. "Bring the witness," he commanded.

Ahmed Aga stroked his tightly curled beard and smiled.

"May it please Your Excellency, we have evidence enough to convict him without the witness," said Daoud Aga. "Before I could arrest him, the villain had committed a second murder. Here is the poison phial, and here the bloody simitar with which he slew his accomplice, the cook." He laid the two articles before the Pasha.

"So, O spawn of a pestilence, you sought to cover your trail with blood!"

"I sought vengeance, Excellency, on the slayer of my wife. In the extremity of my anger and grief, I——"

"Enough, O father of lies! Here is the witness."

The soldier, at this moment, ushered into the room Mustafa, the shifty-eyed young *Turki* who had been employed to act as the deceased cook's assistant.

"Tell your tale, Mustafa, and have no fear of your master," said the Pasha.

"I bear witness," said the fellow, looking down his greasy nose and avoiding my gaze, "that my master gave a bottle of strong-smelling essence to Sufeyd, the cook, this morning, and ordered him to use it in flavoring the pastries he was to prepare for my mistress."

"You lie, O scum of the gutters!" I cried, springing toward him.

He cringed back, guilty fear written on his face. But the soldiers gripped me and dragged me back.

I appealed to the Pasha. "Your Excellency, would you condemn an innocent man on the unsupported word of so low a scoundrel?"

"It happens, O vile poisoner and assassin," replied the Pasha, "that his word is

not unsupported." He signed to a soldier. "Bring the other witnesses."

**T**wo more ruffians of the type who would whine for a para by day, and slit your throat for one at night, were ushered in. They stated that they were friends of Sufeyd, and that they had stopped in his kitchen to pass the time of day with him that morning. Then both subscribed to the falsehood that while there, they had seen me give the powerful essence to the cook, with instructions to use it in the pastry he was preparing for the *hanoum*.

"What have you to say to this, O double murderer?" asked the Pasha, when they had finished.

"That I have never seen these lying malefactors before. For reasons best known to themselves, they bear false witness, as did the other."

"Perhaps you have a witness to prove that you were not in the kitchen this morning?"

"As a matter of fact, I was in the kitchen this morning," I replied.

"Hah!"

"But Selma Hanoum was with me. I stood beside her while she hired Sufeyd and this lying villain, Mustafa."

"And you did not return later, as these three witnesses have testified?"

"No."

"Since you show no signs of repentance and confession, I will confront you with still further evidence of your guilt." He motioned to a soldier, who went out, and returned with an old Jew, whom I recognized as the keeper of a small chemist shop in the *souk*.

"Ishak," said the Pasha, pointing to me, "have you ever seen this person before?"

"Often, Your Excellency," replied the

chemist. "Only this morning he purchased from me a small phial of prussic acid."

"Ah! Is this the phial?"

"It is the same, Your Excellency."

"That is all. The witnesses may go."

As the four false witnesses who had sworn away my life filed out, I bowed my head to await my sentence. After all, what did it matter if death should claim me now? With the passing of Selma Hanoum, the light of my life had gone out. Why, then, should I cling to the empty shell of existence that remained? But life is sweet to us all, no matter how barren or sordid it may be, and so I spoke again to the Pasha.

"These are lies, all lies. Some one has poisoned my wife and conspired to ruin me—has paid these cutthroat dregs of Mosul to bear false witness. What possible reason could I have to slay her whom I loved above all else in the world?"

"That, O double murderer, we can answer, also," replied the Pasha. He turned to Ahmed Aga. "Produce your papers, *sidi*."

The *aga* drew from beneath his cloak a paper, the edges of which were brown and cracked with age, and respectfully handed it to the Pasha.

"Here, O dog of a *Badawi*, is a document signed by Ali Pasha, father of Selma Hanoum—may Allah concede them both mercy!—in which he acknowledges the receipt from the father of Ahmed Aga, on whom be peace, of twenty thousand pounds. I have had the interest computed, and the total amount now due is forty-two thousand pounds.

"Selma Hanoum knew of the existence of this note, but the noble and generous Ahmed Aga, because of the friendship which had always existed between their fathers, never pressed her for payment, knowing that she, the greatest lady of



Mosul, would thereby be impoverished, and hoping that she would marry some one with wealth and station to match her own, so that this considerable part of his inheritance might be returned to him.

"But she wedded with him, O consort of mangy camels—with a penniless beggar from the desert wastes. Without a doubt, she told you of the debt, and you plotted to elude it and seize her wealth by compassing her death and becoming her heir, knowing that the obligation of her father could not be brought to you for payment. You asked for a reason, and I have the reason here, signed and sealed by Ali Pasha, two witnesses, and a venerable *kazi*."

"Your Excellency," I cried, aghast at the net of false evidence which was tightening around me, "that paper is a forgery, and the man who forged it sits in the place of honor at your right hand. I see it all, now. It was Ahmed Aga who hired my cook and helper and sent his own tools to apply for their places, Ahmed Aga whose gold paid these dregs of the bazars to bear false witness against me, in order that he might seize the palace and property of Selma Hanoum."

The Pasha looked horrified. Then his brows knitted in anger. "Vile wretch and base prevaricator!" he said, "think not to avert your fate by maligning one of our most pious and upright citizens. For such as you, any death is too good. Had you shown some sign of repentance I would only have had you beheaded, but as it is, you shall have a more lingering and painful passing." He turned to Daoud Aga. "Take this low-born swine to the center of the *souk*, and there impale him, that all may see his shameful death, and that other villains of his stripe may be warned."

Once more Ahmed Aga smiled, as he stroked his curled black beard.

AS THE soldiers dragged me from the Pasha's presence, I saw, standing near the door, a slight veiled figure. For a moment, a pair of night-black almond eyes gazed into mine and flashed me a look of sympathy which showed that among those who stood in the audience chamber, I had at least one friend. I recognized my little slave-girl from Cathay.

The thought came that I should at least give this girl her freedom before being done to death, but when I held back to speak to her, my conductors jerked me forward, while Daoud Aga, walking behind, prodded me with the point of his simitar.

A crowd of riffraff which had gathered in the street outside, greeted me with cries of: "Kill the poisoner! Slay the assassin!" and many coarse jests at my expense. "Where is he to be beheaded?" I heard one ask, as the rabble fell in around and behind me.

"He is not to be beheaded," answered a soldier, "but will be permitted to view the *souk* from a lofty and narrow seat until such time as Shaitan shall see fit to seize upon his condemned soul."

"An impalement!" cried another. "How long will he live, *effendi*?"

"Only Allah is all-knowing, *ya hu*," replied the soldier; "yet if his viscera be sufficiently tough he may last out the day, and even glimpse tomorrow's sun."

Dazed by the terrible realization of what was in store for me, I stumbled on, scarce hearing their foul jests and fouler maledictions. Those who could get near enough, kicked, struck, pinched and pulled me, while others hurled refuse and spat upon me. Soon my garments hung in filthy tatters and my body was a mass of bruises. I could scarcely realize that I, an innocent man, and until now one of the

most affluent and respected citizens of the pashalik, was about to suffer the death by torment which is meted out only to the lowest and most depraved felons. It seemed that I must be the victim of some hideous nightmare from which I would presently waken—that these, my tormenters, did not really mean to slay me.

By the time I reached the *souk*, I was so weakened by the beating I had received and the contemplation of the horrible fate that was planned for me, that I could scarcely stand, but was supported on either side by the two soldiers.

Presently the executioner came, pushing his way through the crowd and carrying a heavy stake on one shoulder. An assistant followed him with a spade. The executioner drew his *jambiyah* and began whittling the narrow end of the stake, while his helper commenced the heavier but less skilful task of digging the hole for it.

Evidently an expert in his line, the executioner took great pride in his grim profession. The conscious cynosure of all eyes, he worked with many flourishes and grandiose gestures, yet with extreme care in order that the stake might have just the proper degree of sharpness and smoothness to insure me a lingering and painful death. For if it were too sharp, my weight might instantly drive it into my vitals and thus swiftly release me from my misery, while a few rough edges or splinters might cause hemorrhages which would lead to coma and death, thus again defeating his purpose, and disappointing the crowd which counted on gloating over my miseries for many hours to come.

His whittling done with, the executioner critically surveyed the work of his perspiring assistant, who was just completing the hole. After a few unnecessary instructions, which were obviously intended to parade his authority before the rabble rather than instruct his helper, he took a

cord from beneath his garments, and ordered me to hold out my wrists to be bound.

At this juncture, however, there occurred a sudden interruption. "Make way for the Pasha's emissary," some one shouted. "Stand aside for the messenger of His Excellency."

There was a clatter of hoofbeats behind me, and a rider, whose features I could not see because a corner of the *kufiyah* was drawn across the face, clattered up, waving a pistol menacingly, and crying: "By order of the Pasha, this execution must stop. The prisoner is to be taken before His Excellency at once, as new evidence has just come to light. Set the prisoner on the horse."

Daoud Aga looked insolently up at the rider. "Whence came you, fool?" he asked. "Be off, before we sharpen a second stake for you."

"I am from the Pasha, O great baboon," replied the rider, pointing the pistol full at the Captain's head. "Order the prisoner placed on the horse at once, or this instant will I send your unbelieving soul to Eblis, who waits to seize it."

Daoud Aga quite evidently did not believe that the rider was from the Pasha. Nor, for that matter, did I. The Captain seemed convinced, however, that the daring horseman meant business, for his face paled, and he signed to the two soldiers to lift me into the saddle. They complied, for I was too weak to mount alone. I swayed dizzily, and would have fallen but for my tight grip on the pommel. A swift glance at me evidently convinced the rider that I could hang on, for we wheeled and rode off through the disappointed crowd in the direction of the Pasha's palace.

**B**EFORE we had ridden far, I heard the report of firearms behind us, and bullets began singing around our heads. My

rescuer, who was still leading my horse, suddenly turned toward the east gate of the city. We passed through the gate unchallenged, clattering across a stone bridge, then a narrow island, then a bridge of boats—for the Tigris was at flood and the ford impassable—and landing, plunged through the dust and desolation that had once been mighty Nineveh. Presently we turned again, this time toward the northwest, following the windings of the river, so I judged that we were making for Telkef.

After we had ridden thus at breakneck speed for some ten miles, we stopped to breathe our horses. During that swift ride my companion had not addressed a word to me, and I had been too weak to attempt any conversation. I had noticed that my rescuer was small, much smaller than the average man, but I gasped in amazement when, with the *kufiyah* drawn aside, I recognized my little slave-girl.

"Lo Foo!" I exclaimed. "So it was you who saved my life! May Allah requite you."

"To abandon one's master is to become a flower without a root," she replied, modestly. "Here, I have brought you a simitar, *jambiyah* and pistol."

She handed me a bundle, which I unwrapped. The wrapper was a cloak and contained the weapons she had named. I armed myself as she was armed, and threw the cloak over my tattered garments.

"By what powerful magic did you obtain these horses, weapons and clothing?" I asked.

"Fowls are best caught with rice grains," she replied. "I saw two *Hytas* who had just ridden into the city, standing beside their horses. To one, I signed with the eyes as I passed. Then I turned into an empty dwelling near by, but as I turned, I signed also to the other, unknown to the first.

"When the first seized me, I snatched

his pistol and held him off, whereupon the second came to my rescue. They quarreled, and the second man choked the first into unconsciousness. Then, with the butt of the pistol, I sent him to join his fellow in oblivion. It was easy to appropriate what clothing and weapons I needed, and ride off with the horses."

"You are a jewel of inestimable worth, Lo Foo," I said, "and have performed a dangerous and difficult task as no man could have accomplished it."

"No jewel sparkles except by reflected light, my lord," she replied. "If I have attained some brilliance, it is in the light of your presence. But come. You are weary and wounded. If I mistake not, that is a deserted farmer's hut at the foot of yonder hill, and there are provisions in the saddle-bags."

"Tiger Lily," I said, as we walked our horses toward the tumbledown hut, "I am a broken and ruined man, a fugitive from the power of the Pasha, yet you honor me as if I were a sultan, with all the wealth and magnificence of Salah ad Din."

For some time she made no answer. Then, as she turned her face toward me, I saw that tears trembled on her long, curved lashes. "I am a stranger in a strange land," she replied. "You saved me from worse than death at the hands of that black, blubber-lipped *Shaitan*. You are my master—my father and my mother. Shall I, who would have shared your prosperity, desert you in adversity?"

"You have read me a lesson in loyalty which I shall never forget," I told her.

## 5

AS NO signs of pursuit developed, we permitted our tired horses to walk all the way to the hut. Then we tethered them, and went inside. I gathered wood and soon had a fire crackling, while Lo Foo brought a waterskin and a few uten-



sals, some flour, sugar, dates, clarified butter, and coffee, which she had found in the saddle-bags. First she set the dates to simmering in the clarified butter. Then she mixed bread. While it was baking, she brewed coffee.

Watching her make these preparations, I marveled at the wondrous ways in which Allah guides our footsteps so that we may fulfil our destinies. Had I not idly wandered into the slave mart that morning, and then been led to purchase this slave-girl for Selma Hanoum, I would have been, at that very moment, dying a slow and painful death, hooted and jeered by the rabble of Mosul.

We sipped coffee until the food was ready, then ate our dates and freshly baked bread. Our simple meal finished, Lo Foo brewed more coffee, then pleasantly surprised me with a *chibouk*, which she had found in the saddle-bag, stuffed with *Suryani* tobacco and surmounted by a glowing coal from the fire.

Although Lo Foo was bright and cheerful, and was obviously trying to distract my mind from the great sorrow which had overtaken me, my bosom was constricted and I had not the power of peace. Presently, as I grew more melancholy with each thought of my lost Selma, I arose, and went outside to attend to our horses. After unsaddling the weary beasts and rubbing them with grass, I took them down to the river, about a half-mile distant, to drink.

The sun had dropped low on the horizon, so I made ablution and prayed the sunset prayer, ere I started back. I was walking toward the hut in the gathering dusk, leading the horses, when six armed men, who had evidently been watching me from ambush, suddenly sprang out of a ravine only a short distance from the hut, and confronted me. The foremost, whom I recognized as one of the cutthroats who had borne false witness against me,

plucked out a pistol and snapped it in my face. It did not go off, luckily for me, and drawing my own pistol, I shot him through the heart.

As he slumped to the ground, another fired at me and missed. In the meantime, the four remaining villains, who had no pistols, had drawn their simitars, and began to circle me to the right and left. The horses had not flinched during the shooting, and now, seeing that against such overwhelming odds my only hope lay in flight, I turned and swung to the bare back of my mount, and slapped him on the flank.

The well-trained beast responded with a leap and a burst of speed that quickly took me out of reach of my assailants, while his mate galloped behind me. But it was written that I should not thus escape them, for the animal suddenly stumbled and went to his knees, pitching me over his head. I fell heavily, alighting on my back with such force that the wind was knocked from me. For a few moments I lay there, gasping for breath and unable to rise. I could hear the triumphant cries of my enemies and the thudding of their feet as they came nearer and nearer, which stimulated me to make desperate efforts to get to my feet. Finally I succeeded, and drawing my simitar and *jambiyah*, stood there at bay, reeling like a man whose senses have been stolen by *arak*.

Seeing the plight I was in, my enemies advanced with exultant shouts. One, whom I recognized as the third miscreant to bear false witness against me before the Pasha, sprang in close, expecting to find me an easy victim, and slashed viciously at my neck. He proved to be a clumsy swordsman, and weak as I was, I managed to parry the blow and return one in kind, which stretched him on the ground.

This gave the others pause, and for a moment they stood back, shouting curses

at me. It was evident that whoever they might be, they were neither swordsmen nor soldiers, so I judged that, like the two I had slain, they must be hirelings of Ahmed Aga. The one who had a pistol began to reload it, so I did the same with mine. Seeing this, he desisted, and called to his companions to all charge me at once.

By this time I had recovered my breath, and my confidence in myself had been considerably heightened. I thrust the still useless pistol back into my sash, and once more drew simitar and *jambiyah*. They spread out to surround me, but still feared to come within reach of my blade. Lying scattered on the ground in the vicinity were a number of ancient bricks, made before the time of Suleiman ben Daoud, on whom be peace, and stamped with cuneiform inscriptions. They had evidently fallen from the panniers of some pilferer of the ruins of Nineveh, perhaps during a raid by robbers, who naturally would not carry off such things. My cowardly assailants now began hurling these bricks at me, and as they kept coming from several directions at once, I could not avoid them all, dodge as I would. Presently, after I had received a number of painful, though not dangerous bruises, one struck my left knee, so paralyzing it that I was forced to stand on my right leg only. A moment later, another caught me on the back of the head, and down I went, still dimly conscious, but unable to move hand or foot.

With yells of triumph, my enemies now rushed in to finish me. One planted his foot on my body, and raised his simitar to hack off my head. I was convinced that my end had come.

But at that moment a pistol shot rang out, and my would-be beheader fell across my body, blood oozing from a round hole in his forehead. Then Lo Foo, who had been attracted by the sounds of the conflict, came running up. She threw down

her smoking pistol, and drawing her simitar with her right hand, snatched mine up with her left.

What came after took place so swiftly that my eyes, dulled by the blow I had received, could scarcely follow. Often had I seen men fight with simitar and *jambiyah*, but never before had I seen any one use *two* simitars at the same time. She struck at the head of my nearest enemy with the right, and when he parried, brought the left across his abdomen with a swift, drawing cut, disemboweling him.

The remaining two had, meanwhile, recovered from their astonishment at this sudden onslaught, and as their comrade went down, both attacked her simultaneously. I have said that these men were obviously not expert swordsmen, and that was true enough; yet with two of them against one, and that one a mere slip of a girl, I despaired for her life. I made a desperate effort to rise, and succeeded in dragging myself from beneath the body that had fallen across me. But when I tried to get to my feet, a dizziness assailed me, and I fell back to my elbows.

Through the dim haze that had gathered before my eyes, I saw a bewildering whirl of swiftly flying blades. Then suddenly one of Lo Foo's antagonists went down with his head split open. The other, seeing his comrade's fate, turned to flee, but only hastened his own end. The girl sprang forward, and with a sweeping moulinet smote his neck so that his head leaped from his shoulders. After that I saw no more, for consciousness left me, and it seemed that I was sinking into a black, cold void.

## 6

WHEN my senses returned, it was broad daylight. I was lying in the hut, with two cloaks beneath me, and two more thrown over me. A pile of pistols,

similitars and *jambiyabs* lay on the floor, and beyond them, eight saddles, with saddle-bags, waterskins and other equipment, were piled against the wall.

I sat up, and discovered at one and the same time a dull ache in my head and a sharp pain in my left knee. Exploration revealed a lump on the back of my head that had been carefully bound. Raising my coverings, I saw that my knee, also, had been bandaged. Then Lo Foo entered.

Depositing the bundle of firewood she was carrying beside the smoldering fire, she came over, and kneeling beside me, said: "Good morning, my lord. I trust that you slept well, and that the pain of your injuries has grown less."

"I rested in complete oblivion, little one," I replied, "and the wounds are nothing. But tell me, who brought me here, and whence came all these weapons and this equipment?"

"I brought you, my lord."

"You brought me!"

"Yes, master."

"But how?"

"I carried you."

"*Wallah!* You carried me?" I looked at her slight figure, her slender limbs and dainty hands. She was at least a foot shorter than I, and probably did not weigh much more than half as much.

She saw my look of unbelief, and said: "You doubt it? We have a saying: 'The sea is not measured by a bushel, nor is a man always known by his looks.' I will show you."

Before I was aware of what she was about, she had bent and clasped me around the waist. With no more effort than if I had been a sack of grain, she threw me across her shoulder and stood erect. She walked over, and gently lowered me to a place beside the fire, with a little chuckle of merriment. "You see?"

"*Albamdolillah!* You are as strong as a man!" I exclaimed.

"Stronger than some men, my lord, but not quite so strong as you," she answered modestly, "though I may understand the laws of leverage better, having been taught them by my father."

"Your father must be a remarkable man," I told her. "Who is he?"

"My father is the Wong Tse, Chin Wah, a prince of the ancient blood, whose lands are partly in China and partly in Mongolia. In the days of his youth, he wandered much in foreign lands. And everywhere he went, he studied methods of offense and defense, both with weapons and with the bare hands, for he knew that some day he must take over the domain of the great warrior prince who was his father, and that it would require a strong man, well versed in these things, to hold that domain."

"Then you are really a princess!" I exclaimed.

"I was once a princess," she corrected. "Now I am but a slave."

"Is it customary in your country to train a princess in the arts of war?" I asked.

"Not at all," she replied. "My father longed for a son. But I was his first-born, and when I came, my mother died. So great was his love for my mother, that when she was taken, he could bear to have no other woman near him. He said that I should be both son and daughter to him, and that when he was gone, I should be war-lord in his place. Accordingly, although he saw that I was educated in all the arts and wiles that are taught our women, he himself, when I was very young, set about teaching me to shoot, fence, box, ride and use the lance. He taught me an art he had learned in Nippon, *jiu jitsu*, and trained me daily in the exercise which he loved best—two-sword fighting.

"As soon as I was old enough, I went



with him on hunting expeditions. Once, when we were on a hunt, I became separated from the rest of the party, and was captured by a band of Mongol outlaws, but not before I had slain five of their number and wounded several more.

"The bandit chieftain tried to woo me, but I broke his arm. He would have slain me, then, but his men restrained him. Some called me Lo Foo, the Tigress. My own name, in our language, meant 'Lily.' Soon they were calling me the Tiger Lily. A few days later, the well-guarded caravan of Yusuf ben Ali, the Pathan trader, camped near us, and I was sold to him as the Tiger Lily.

"Yusuf, the old dotard, had me brought to his tent that night. He attempted to beguile me with honeyed phrases, but when he saw that I would have none of him, attempted force. I spared his old bones, but after I had thrown him over my head, he desisted. Later he brought me to Mosul along with other merchandise, having heard that high prices were paid for virgins in its slave market."

SHE had knelt by the fire as she began her narrative, and set about preparing our morning meal, a repetition of the one we had eaten the night before. She looked so gentle, so feminine and so daintily alluring at this domestic task, that had I not seen what I had seen with my own eyes, I should have considered her story wholly incredible.

"Lo Foo," I said, as she handed me my coffee, "some day, if Allah grants me life and strength, I will restore you to your father."

She turned her great black eyes full upon me, and in them was a look of tenderness. "You are kind, my master, but I doubt that such happiness lies in my destiny. And we are taught that it is wise to submit to destiny."

O. S.—2

"All things are possible to Allah," I replied.

For some time we ate our simple meal in silence. Then Lo Foo said: "This morning as I went for water, I saw twelve troopers of the *Yuz Bashi* riding along the river bank."

"They were looking for me, beyond a doubt," I replied. "Perhaps we had best leave this place, and ride for the mountains."

"As I was gathering firewood, I saw ten more *Hytas* in the other direction," she continued.

"Strange they didn't see our horses!" I mused.

"I tethered them all in the ravine before daybreak," she replied. "The bodies of our enemies I hid in a clump of shrubs. Fortunately, our fire had burned down to a few glowing coals, and there was no smoke to betray us."

"By the life of my head!" I swore, "now I know that you have not slept all night. We remain here, and you shall sleep all day."

"I will sleep if you so command, master," she replied, submissively. But she would not do so until she had put away the food, cleansed the dishes, and brought my *chibouk* topped with a glowing coal. Then she curled up like a kitten, on the couch of cloaks I had just quitted, and fell asleep almost instantly.

When I had finished my smoke, I went to the doorway and stood idly looking out. During the rest of the day, I saw no less than six parties of *Hytas* pass our hiding-place. But none came to look for us in the ruined hut.

IN THE late afternoon I heard the tinkle of camel bells, and saw a large caravan pass down to the river. It was accompanied by much live stock, and many women and children; so I knew it was not a band of traders but a company of the

wandering *Badawin*, seeking pasture for their flocks and herds. Soon a miniature town of tents stood on the river bank, and the countryside was dotted with herds attended by the younger boys of the tribe.

I knew it would only be a question of time before our horses should be discovered in the ravine by these young herdsmen, though they might escape detection for the present, as night would soon fall. So I decided that we had best be on the move. Accordingly, I baked bread, made *samb*, and brewed coffee. Then I awakened Lo Foo.

While we ate the hastily prepared meal, I told her of the *Badawin* encampment, and of my resolve to leave as soon as it should be dark enough to hide our movements.

"Have you decided where we will go, master?" she asked.

"Not definitely," I replied. "Perhaps it will be best to ride east, swim our beasts across the Great Zab, and cross the mountains into Persia."

"And then?"

"I don't know," I confessed.

"The Persians are as likely to slay you for your possessions as the Turks," she said. "I know, for I have just come through Persia."

"That is true," I admitted. "But there, at least, I will not have a price on my head."

"What of these *Badawin*?" she asked. "Should they not prove friendly? You are a *Badawi*, are you not?"

"They are of my race," I replied, "but of a tribe unknown to me. However, all *Badawin* in this territory are unfriendly to the *Hytas* because of the depredations of Mohammed Pasha, Hafiz Pasha's predecessor. Nor would the troopers of the *Yuz Bashi* dare to approach their camp, except in considerable force."

"Then you are one with them in your enmity against the Turkish regime, as well as in race. Why not claim protection from their *shaykh*?"

"In that case," I replied, "Hafiz Pasha would offer a reward for me, and I, a stranger in their midst, should be exchanged soon enough for gold."

For some time Lo Foo knit her delicately arched brows in thought. Then she said: "I doubt that we could ride far in any direction, with the *Hytas* swarming over the country in search of us. And as you say, the *Badawin* might be willing to surrender you to the Pasha if tempted with sufficient gold. I believe there is but one thing for us to do."

"And what is that?"

"Ride back to Mosul."

"What! I trust that you have not taken leave of your senses."

"Tell me, master, have you one friend in Mosul whom you can trust?"

"There is one, yes," I replied. "He was absent on a hunting-trip yesterday, or he would have been at my side to defend me."

"Is he a householder?"

"Yes, and greatly respected in the community," I replied. "He is Hasan Aga, uncle of Selma Hanoum."

"Do you think you can convince him of your innocence?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then, my lord, I suggest that we ride back to Mosul on the back of a camel this very night. We have eight horses, with complete equipment, extra weapons, and supplies. The *Badawin* have many camels, and you should easily be able to arrange a trade with their *shaykh*. I will go in my proper raiment, and as your *harim*."

She took her woman's raiment from one of the saddle-bags, and while I smoked my *chibouk* before the door, swiftly donned it. Presently she appeared

in the doorway, cloaked, and veiled to the eyes.

"I regret that I must part with my simitars," she said, "but I have two pistols and a *jambiyah* beneath my cloak, and a bundle of simitars will be strapped to my saddle in case of need. Come, let me change your appearance."

I had already exchanged my tattered finery for the best of the clothing she had taken from my assailants, which was poor enough. She now, after taking a small pot of kohl from among her cosmetics, blackened the inner corners of my eyebrows so they appeared to run together, and kohled my eyelids in such a manner that I looked slightly cross-eyed. Then, after she had darkened the day's growth of mustache which had appeared on my upper lip, her mirror convinced me that I should be able to pass even my closest friends, unrecognized.

WE SADDLED the horses, loaded the equipment, and started for the encampment, just before sunset. I rode into camp in time to pray the sunset prayer with a group of young men who had just brought in a herd of camels. Then I asked them to direct me to the tent of their *shaykh*.

They led me to a large and capacious tent of black goat hair, before which stood a tall, handsome *Badawin* about forty years of age. After we had exchanged *taslims*, I said: "I am Sa'id bin Ayyub of the Banu Asadin."

"And I am Shaykh Abd er Rahmin, of the Abu Salman," he replied, courteously. "*Bismillah*. Enter in the Name of Allah. This is your tent, and we are your slaves."

The *shaykh* led me into the reception room of his tent, which was crowded with his relatives and followers, and strangers enjoying his hospitality, and also occupied by two favorite mares and a colt. He bade me be seated, and sat with me, in the

upper place, divided from the *harim* by a goatskin curtain. Pipes and coffee were brought, and a small boy, who came from the *harim* at a summons from Abd er Rahmin, was sent back with directions that my wife, who waited outside, was to be taken inside and entertained forthwith.

The *shaykh* politely refrained from questioning me, and we talked trivialities for some time. But gradually I got around to that for which I had come, as is customary with our people.

Abd er Rahmin listened sympathetically while I told him of being set upon by six robbers the day before, nor did he show the slightest disbelief when I said I had vanquished them all, single-handed, and appropriated their horses, weapons and equipment. I told him that I had no use for all these horses and weapons, and as my *harim* was weary of traveling on horseback, would like to exchange four horses with their equipment, for a riding-camel with a *shugduf* litter.

"Were the *harami* from Mosul?" he asked.

"I am positive of that," I replied, "because when they rode up to surround me, thinking me an easy prey, I heard one say that they would take my *harim* back to Mosul to sell in the slave mart."

"By Allah, good!" he exclaimed. "Now I know that you do not wish to take any of their horses into Mosul, for fear they might be recognized."

I had told him this because I knew how his people hated the ruffians of Mosul, hoping it would arouse his sympathy, but I now saw that it had, in addition, aroused his cupidity. He knew he had the power to drive a hard bargain, and would make the most of it.

We haggled back and forth over many cups of coffee, and *sbaribat*, and several pipes of '*Ajami*, he because he wished to get all he could for his camel and litter,



and I because it was the thing to do, and he would have been suspicious had I not done so. But I had come prepared to leave all our horses, and most of our equipment, in exchange for what I wanted, so in the end the bargain was thus concluded.

For some time, savory odors had been issuing from the women's quarters, and now a sheep, roasted whole, and surrounded by boiled rice drenched in clarified butter, was brought in on a huge platter.

"*Bismillab*," pronounced the *shaykh*, placing me at his right hand, while as many as could conveniently do so squatted around the platter. "With health and appetite."

Highly pleased by the bargain he had driven, Abd er Rahmin showered honors and compliments upon me, and fed me choice bits of meat and dripping balls of rice with his own hand.

I grew nervous before the feast was over, as I was anxious about Lo Foo, knowing she would be expected to unveil and remove her cloak in the *harim*, and wondering how she would conceal her pistols and dagger or account for them. I was also extremely impatient, now that our plans had been made and half carried out, to start for Mosul.

But I was compelled to avoid all appearance of haste, and so remained to partake of fruits, sweetmeats, more coffee, and another pipe. By this time, half the evening had slipped away, so I arose to take leave of my host. He sent one of his small sons into the *harim* for Lo Foo, and we walked out to where a boy watched my dearly purchased camel, which was kneeling, laden and waiting.

Lo Foo came out a moment later, and took her place in the *shugduf*. I climbed in on my side of the crude litter, the camel rose, and we were off, followed by the cordial *taslim* of the *shaykh*.

7.

AS WE rode away from the camp in our swaying litter, the countryside was wrapped in a clear, moonless night that was like a spangled, blue-black cloak, with sparkling stars for sequins.

"How did they treat you in the *harim*?" I asked Lo Foo.

"They were very polite," she replied.

"And didn't they question you?"

"Only as to the health of my parents, brothers and sisters, all my paternal and maternal uncles, aunts and cousins, and yours. I managed to hide my weapons under my sash before I removed my cloak. When I unveiled, I think they took me for a Tatar, as I caught some sullen looks among the older women. But I quickly told them I was from Cathay, whereupon all grew cheerful once more. And were you well received by the *shaykh*, my lord?"

"Most cordially," I replied, "and was particularly and singularly honored after he had made certain he was to profit mightily by my visit. But Abd er Rahmin has a good heart, after all. He could have slain me, and taken everything."

"True," she agreed. "He could have taken everything—like Ahmed Aga."

At mention of my deadly enemy, my anger and grief flared up and were like to choke me, as I thought anew of the irreparable loss I had sustained because of the machinations of this thief and murderer.

Lo Foo must have quickly sensed the effect her words had upon me, for she said: "Pray forgive me, my lord. I spoke hastily, and without thought."

"If I could but meet that vilest of vile poisoners, man to man," I said, "I would quickly put an end to his enjoyment of his ill-gotten gains. As for forgiving you, why, that is done already, for any transgression against me, now or in the future.

It is written that for the sake of one good action, a hundred evil ones should be forgotten. And this being true, I am indebted to you to the extent of at least a thousand."

"You are generous, my lord. As we rode out of the camp I thought of a plan which, if possible of execution, might bring about the wish you just expressed—to meet your enemy face to face, where none can interrupt."

"A plan? Tell it to me."

"Not now, master. First let me mature it a little more, and also, if it will not wring your heart too much, tell me of the adventures at which you have hinted, which led up to your marrying Selma Hanoum."

Lo Foo, it was obvious, had a remarkable understanding of the workings of the human emotions. Although it was difficult for me to begin my narrative, I found as I got into it, that this was exactly what I wanted to do—to talk to some one about my lost love, and the romantic adventures which had brought us together. I wanted to linger over each wonderful memory and to share it with a sympathetic and appreciative listener. Such I found Lo Foo to be.

And so, while I related the story of our adventures, and enlarged on the beauty, grace and goodness of my dear departed, thus somewhat easing the burden which hung so heavily upon my heart, our patient beast stepped off the long miles; and before I realized it, we were at the bridge of boats which led to the east gate of Mosul.

We crossed this bridge, the island, and the stone bridge beyond without interruption, but were halted at the gate by a gruff soldier, a half-dozen of whose comrades stood near by.

"Who are you, to ride into the city thus unattended at this hour of the night?" he demanded. "And whence came you?"

"I am Sa'id bin Ayyub," I replied. "We left Telkef early this morning, but were entertained all afternoon and half the evening by the *shaykh* of the Abu Salman, hence the lateness of our arrival."

"Saw you aught of two riders on the way, one a tall, beardless youth of about your own size in tattered finery, the other shorter, and wearing the colors of the *Hytas*?"

"We saw many *Hytas*," I replied, "and several bands stopped to question us, but met no riders such as you describe."

"Whither are you bound?"

"To the house of Ahmed Aga, who is the friend of my cousin. Can you direct me?"

When I mentioned the name of the opulent *aga*, the gruff manner of the soldier changed, as if by magic. Politely, he gave me minute directions as to how I could reach the house which had been my own. Then he stepped aside, and we passed into the city.

WE MADE straight for the residence of Ahmed Aga, but of course passed it, and stopped before the house of Hasan Aga. After causing the camel to kneel, I dismounted, and knocked loudly on the door. The place was in darkness, showing that the inmates had retired, but presently I heard shuffling footsteps in the *salamlik*, and the voice of Hasan, himself, asking: "Who are you?"

"Your nephew," I replied. "Open quickly, in the name of Almighty Allah."

"I have many nephews," he replied, cautiously.

"I am he who bought the rose, which was stricken by the viper," I replied, reluctant to give my name for fear of being overheard.

At this, I heard the bolt slide back, and knew that Hasan had understood my allusion to Selma Hanoum and the man who had poisoned her. He opened the door a

little way, and held up a flickering lantern, by the yellow light of which I saw his gray-bearded, kindly face. But seeing my changed features, he started back, and was about to close the door again when I thrust my foot through the opening.

"I am really Hamed, O uncle, but in disguise," I said. Then he recognized my voice and flung the door wide.

"Who is with you?" he asked, now speaking in a hushed voice.

"A slave-girl I purchased for Selma Hanoum the morning she was murdered," I replied.

"*Bismillah!* Enter, both of you," he invited. "I will bring in your equipment and turn the camel free. It would not do for the beast to be found in my stables. Suspicious might thus be aroused."

Lo Foo and I stepped into the *salamlik*, and waited there in the darkness. Presently I heard him slap the beast's flank and order it to be off. Then he came in with our meager pile of belongings.

"I left the litter on the mangy beast," he said. "Both are so dilapidated that it is problematical which will break down first. But come into the *majlis*. You must be weary and hungry."

"Weary we are, uncle," I replied, "but not hungry, as we have been stuffed by the *shaykh* of the Abu Salman. However, I'll smoke a pipe with you after we find a place for Lo Foo to sleep; that is, if you want to hear my story tonight."

"She shall have my empty *harim*, and welcome," replied Hasan. "As you know, though I have been enabled to keep this house and in a measure refurnish it, due to your generosity and that of my sister's daughter, on whom be Allah's mercy and His blessing, my business has not prospered, and I have been unable either to marry, or purchase slaves. As Ahmed Aga took over all the possessions of Selma

Hanoum this morning, and I was assured of no further income from her estate, I was forced to discharge my servants."

He led the way through the scantily furnished *majlis*, into the sitting-room of the *harim*. In this there was but a single *diwan*, one small rug, several ottomans, and a few taborets. Hasan took a candle from a niche, and lighting it, led Lo Foo to the door of one of the sleeping-rooms. He gave her the candle, and said: "In there you may sleep, little one, safe from all fear."

We then returned to the *majlis*, and bidding me be seated, he went out to fetch pipes and coffee. He returned presently, but before he had the charcoal glowing, Lo Foo came out of the *harim*. She was attired in the clinging, silken garments of her native land, which set off her slender beauty, and had donned a thin, translucent face-veil, out of respect to Hasan Aga, though she was no *Moslemah*.

"I slept all day, master," she said to me, "and can not retire so early. Permit me to serve you, and to remain with you for yet a little while."

Without waiting for my reply, she went over and took the coffee things from Hasan, who, nothing loth, turned everything over to her and came and sat beside me. Though he was far gone in years, I saw his eyes kindle with admiration as he glimpsed her thus without her heavy street garments, and knew that the years had not robbed him of his appreciation of beauty.

While we waited for our coffee and *narghiles*, Hasan told me what I most wanted to hear. He described the magnificent funeral of my lost love, and told me where she had been buried. Tears were welling both from his eyes and mine, when Lo Foo served us.

I then related in detail my adventures since my purchase of Lo Foo, and when I



had finished he said, "By Allah, there is no doubt that Ahmed Aga is the *afai*; the venomous viper who caused my sister's daughter to be poisoned, and who bribed false witnesses to swear away your life, that he might get possession of her wealth and property. Small wonder that, when he learned of your escape, he set six of his own cutthroats on your trail with orders to slay you. The Pasha must be told the truth of this matter."

"Who is to tell him?" I asked. "And what proof is there? You and I know that Ahmed Aga is guilty, and that I am innocent, but how can we prove it?"

Hasan stroked his white beard. "Aye. That's the difficulty," he said. "We can't. And it would be of no use to go before Hafiz Pasha without proof."

"I know a way to bring the murderer to justice, my lord, and restore to you all but her whom you have lost for ever," said Lo Foo, placing fresh charcoal on my pipe-bowl. "But it will take time."

"To accomplish my purpose, I would spend a lifetime, if need be," I replied. "What is the plan?"

"It will not take a lifetime," she said, "but it will take months."

"And what am I to do in the meantime?" I asked.

"You are to grow a beard," she replied, and turning, retired to her room.

## 8

**D**ESPITE the fact that I was confined in the house of Hasan Aga, the months passed quickly. This, I know now, was because of Lo Foo, but at the time I did not realize it. She went out daily in her woman's garb, that concealed all but her eyes, purchasing our food and tobacco in the *souk*, preparing our meals, and looking after our comforts as only a woman can.

One day she brought back four Chinese

swords she had purchased, *gims*, she called them, and thereafter, each day, she taught me two-sword fighting as she had learned it from her father, the great warlord. Often, when I was morose, she danced for me, graceful, rhythmic love-dances, into which she put such depths of feeling that, had I not been blinded by my sorrow and by my hatred of the man who had brought it upon me, would have then revealed her true feeling toward me.

I was not blind to her beauty, but believed I appreciated it as one does a great work of art, unconscious of the flame which, day by day, grew brighter in my bosom.

Often we whiled away the long hours with story-telling. I would relate to her stories I remembered from *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, and she, in turn, would tell me marvelous tales of devils and dragons, of love and war, which she had learned from her own people. Also, she gave me lessons in her language, which I knew passably well because of my previous journey through Cathay, and I taught her to read and write Arabic.

My only other amusement was looking out through the latticed windows of the upper story at the passing throngs of the city. Almost daily I saw the perfidious Ahmed Aga, with his curled beard and magnificent robes, riding forth from, or returning to, the palatial home that had once been mine, on a prancing, richly caparisoned charger. And at such times the hot blood would rush to my face, and my anger and grief would drive me to distraction.

One day I sat before the lattice with Lo Foo beside me, when a procession of strangers such as one seldom sees in Mosul, passed. Brown-skinned, they were, with slanting eyes and high cheek-bones. Their leader, and several of the others, wore ragged, drooping mustaches, but

most of them were smooth-faced. They wore queer, funnel-shaped hats with turned-up rims. Some of them had straight, shiny queues hanging down their backs. Their garments were of heavy quilted material edged with fur or wool, and they bestrode sturdy, shaggy ponies, the like of which I had never seen before. All wore swords. Some carried muskets, some bows and arrows, and some, long, slender lances.

I turned to ask Lo Foo if she knew what manner of men they were, and saw that she had gone deadly pale. "Why, what is wrong?" I asked, surprised.

"Those men," she replied, her voice quivering with emotion. "They are a company of my father's Mongol cavalry. And he who rides at their head is Tserin, my father's most trusted captain."

Behind the riders, who numbered at least a hundred, came the cameleers with their stocky, two-humped *Bukhii* camels. They were laden with felt tents, and many bales, bundles and boxes, the contents of which I could only guess. And on several of them rode handsome, richly dressed Chinese girls.

"Your father has sent for you, Lo Foo," I said. "I will have Hasan Aga bring their captain here, and you shall go back with him."

"But master, I——" She hesitated, apparently at a loss for words, her eyes lowered. "I will go, of course, if you wish it. But Tserin must repay you the sum you paid for me."

"You have already repaid me a thousandfold," I replied. "I will not touch your father's gold."

"But what of my plan to help you?" she asked. "It nears fruition. I can not leave you with the task undone."

"I'll accomplish it alone, somehow," I told her.

"No, I will remain to help you. And

Tserin shall help us. He can be very useful, as you will see."

THAT afternoon, when Hasan returned, I sent him out to look up the captain of the Mongols. He was to tell him nothing, except that if he would come to his house alone, one would be there who could give him news of her whom he sought.

Lo Foo went into the *harim*, where she spent considerable time, evidently preparing herself to receive her father's captain. For when she emerged, she wore her most gorgeous Chinese raiment, and had done her hair in a strange but exceedingly becoming manner. And she had discarded her veil.

She stopped before me for my approval. "How do you like me thus, master?" she inquired.

"You are gorgeous, as always," I replied. "You are like a precious jewel which blazes forth with undiminished glory in any setting. But I must admit that this one is particularly appropriate."

She smiled, and seated herself on a *diwan*. But the smile was a little wistful, as if I had not said precisely what she wanted to hear.

A moment later, Hasan entered, followed by a stocky Mongol with a long, stringy mustache that drooped at the corners. At sight of Lo Foo unveiled, the *aga* gasped in amazement, but the Mongol dropped to his knees before her and bowed again and again, his forehead touching the floor at each bow.

"This unspeakably base and unworthy person who has the honor of being your slave, rejoices with mighty rejoicing at finding Your Highness alive and well," he said.

Lo Foo smiled, and signed for him to rise: "It is good to see you once more, my faithful Tserin," she replied. "Tell me of my father."

"Alas," said Tserin, "that I should be a bearer of bad tidings! On the day you were stolen from us, the Prince suffered a fall from his horse, which injured his spine. We carried him back to the palace, and the greatest and most skilful of physicians were sent for. They found that his back was broken, and must be put in a cast, if he were to be kept alive, even for a short time. This was done, and they held out hopes for his recovery. But he knew they lied to ease his mental anguish, and demanded the truth. Finally they admitted that he would never ride again, and that he was not long for this earth."

Tears streamed down the old captain's cheeks as he finished his brief recital, and I saw that the eyes of Lo Foo were brimming. But she held up bravely. "You have but confirmed the news which came to me when I saw you at the head of the riders this morning, Tserin," she said, her voice shaking with emotion. "I knew that if my father were alive and able to ride, he would have come for me himself."

"He has sworn to fight off death until you return to take charge of your patrimony," Tserin told her. "Then he will be willing to join his ancestors. I have brought six slave-girls to minister to your wants, and a royal *yurt* with the richest of furnishings, and everything you will require for travel in state. Also, the Prince sent with me much gold, to buy you from him who has purchased you, and warriors to take you if he will not sell."

"My master paid eight thousand piasters for me, lost a ring worth twenty, and has kept me and been kind to me these many months. You will pay him the equivalent of thirty thousand, or more, if that will not suffice him."

Tserin drew a heavy purse from beneath his garments and looked at me inquiringly.

"I will not sell," I told him.

"What!" The captain scowled fiercely, and his hand sought his sword hilt.

"I have informed Lo Foo that I would not take her father's gold," I said. "She is free. If you must spend the money, give it to the poor who till the Prince's estates."

Tserin turned to Lo Foo. "I await Your Highness' commands," he said.

"It shall be as my master says," she told him. "I am free, and upon our return, the gold will be distributed to our poor. But this will be only on condition that I be permitted to assist him as I planned to do, before I go. And not until then will I consider myself free."

"But you must go at once," I said. "Your father needs you. Even a day's delay may mean that you will never see him again, alive."

"I am my father's daughter," she said, proudly, "and I know what he would have me do to uphold the honor of our house. Tserin, I will not require my slave-girls at present. Take your company outside the city and pitch the *yurts* where water and grass are plentiful. Then bring me two stout warriors. When I have done what I will do, then tomorrow or the next day, perhaps, we will start for home."

"Your lowly slave hastens to carry out Your Highness' commands," said the captain, making profound obeisance. Then he backed out the door.

AS SOON as he had gone, Lo Foo called me to her side. "When you told me the story of your adventures with Mohammed Pasha, the despoiler," she said, "you mentioned a *souterrain* which connects this house with the one which Ahmed Aga has taken from you. I would like to know through which room in Ahmed's house one passes to enter this *souterrain*."

Hasan brought paper, pen and ink, and



I quickly sketched for her a diagram of both houses, showing how the souterrain led from one to the other, and indicating, so that there could be no mistake, the room in Ahmed's *harim* through which the secret panel might be reached.

"Who knows of this secret passageway, other than you and Hasan Aga?" she asked.

"Musa the eunuch knows," I replied, "but I am sure he has told no one. Nor will he. He is loyal to the memory of Selma Hanoum, and to me."

"It is enough for my purpose if Ahmed Aga does not know," she said.

Then, taking with her the diagram I had made, she turned and went into the *harim*. When she came out she was cloaked and veiled as a *Moslemah*. To me, she said: "I think it best, my lord, that you go into the upper rooms and remain there for some time." To Hasan, she said: "It may be that Ahmed Aga will call on you, thinking you are my master, and offering to buy me from you. Make the price as high as he will pay, but sell me." Then she turned and went into the *salamlik*.

Hasan looked at me inquiringly.

"By Allah and again by Allah!" he exclaimed. "What is she up to now?"

"I know no more than you," I replied, "but you must trust and obey her." Then, leaving the old fellow muttering pious ejaculations in his beard, I mounted to the upper chambers and took my place at the latticed window.

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AFTER I had kept my vigil at the lattice for some time, I saw the opulent and perfidious Ahmed Aga riding toward home on his prancing, spirited steed, as was his custom at this hour of the day. Below me, I heard the door open, then saw Lo Foo step out into the street, a bas-

ket under her arm. As if she had not seen the *aga*, she walked straight in front of the spirited horse.

Ahmed reined up and roared: "*Wal-lah!* Look where you are going, *ya binti!*"

Lo Foo turned as if she had seen the *aga* for the first time, and with a swift motion drew aside her veil and shot him a languishing look from beneath the fringed curtains of her eyelids. Then she as swiftly replaced the veil, and turning, started off down the street.

Instantly the *aga* rode after her. But when she saw him coming, she turned as if frightened, and hurried back toward the house of Hasan.

Ahmed wheeled his prancing steed, rode after her once more, and dismounting, caught her by the arm. "Not so fast, my little *bouri*," he said. "Be not afraid, but come with me to my house. I will cover you with pearls and diamonds, and you shall be the queen of my *harim*."

Lo Foo twisted her arm from his grasp. "Stop!" she exclaimed. "You know not what you are saying. I belong to Hasan Aga, and will enter no house save his."

"Perhaps Hasan Aga will sell you," suggested Ahmed, stroking his crisply curled beard and ogling her.

"Perhaps," she replied. "After all, another can cook and fetch and carry for him as well as I. He is an old man, and has no other use for me."

Ahmed eyed her hungrily. "But I am not an old man, little one, nor am I accounted unhandsome. And I'll swear I would find a more fitting occupation for such a budding flower than polishing pots and baking bread. What say you to a change of masters?"

Lo Foo lowered her gaze, coyly. "I must not forget that Hasan is still my master," she answered, softly.

"I'll go in and see him now," said Ahmed, starting for the door.

"Wait." She laid a restraining hand

on his arm. "No use to go in now. He is not at home. Come tonight after the sunset prayer, and make no mention of our conversation, or he will be furious and refuse to sell me. Also, he will beat me, and it may be that he will kill me."

"Very well. I will come after the sunset prayer. And what is your name, that I may identify you?"

"I am his only slave-girl, so the name does not matter," she replied. "Merely tell him that your second wife saw me at the *hammam*, and would like to have me to serve her."

"I will be patient until after the sunset prayer," said Ahmed, swinging into his saddle. Lo Foo watched him ride away, then turned and entered the house.

I HASTENED downstairs to meet her. "You heard?" she asked.

"I both saw and heard," I replied. "Now what is to be done? Are we to capture him here in Hasan's house, when he calls to purchase you?"

"And bring suspicion on me and my house?" asked Hasan.

"Hardly," replied Lo Foo. "You, O uncle, will pretend that I am your slave-girl, when Ahmed comes to call on you this evening. You will agree to sell me, but only after extracting every last piaster you can from him. I will then go with him."

"Wait," I interposed. "I refuse to permit you to make such a sacrifice."

"But there will be no sacrifice, my lord," she said. "It is merely an adventure, and one which I shall enjoy."

"Ahmed is a handsome youth," I said, and could have bitten my tongue off the next instant when I saw her flush to the temples.

But her reply was calm enough. "You misunderstood, master. I fear no man, and am perfectly capable of taking care of myself. Now for the rest of the plan.

As I have said, I will go with Ahmed Aga to his house. I will dance for him, and he will desire me. But I will refuse to go with him into any room, save the one which has the secret panel that connects with the souterrain. That is why I asked you for a diagram of the house. I had to know that room beyond any shadow of doubt. You, my master, will be waiting behind the panel. Tserin will be with you, and two of his warriors will stand at the bottom of the ladder to assist in case of trouble. But you must not, under any consideration, enter the room until I sign for you to do so, no matter what takes place."

"There is too much danger to you in this plan," I said. "I refuse to be a party to it. I prefer to leave Ahmed to his ill-gotten gains, rather than put you in such peril."

"Then, for this once, my lord, I must disobey you. Either you will carry out my plan as I have outlined it, or I will enter the house of the *aga* myself, at the first opportunity."

Whereupon, there being nothing else left for me to do, I agreed.

Shortly thereafter, Tserin returned with two warriors. All three made obeisance before Lo Foo, and she set the warriors to preparing our evening meal. After we had eaten, the three Mongols declined *narghiles*, but smoked, instead, their strange, baton-like pipes with tiny brass bowls, each of which held only a pinch of tobacco.

Presently there was a knock at the front door, and all of us except Hasan scurried hastily back into the next room. We heard him admit the young *aga*. Then he clapped his hands, and Lo Foo went out to serve pipes and coffee.

For more than an hour we sat there, smoking and waiting, while Hasan dickered with his guest. Then Lo Foo came in and hastily gathered some of her be-

longings into a bundle. "The poisoner bought me for thirty-five thousand piasters," she said. "I am going with him now. Don't fail to be behind the panel at the end of the souterrain, as planned."

"We will be there," I assured her.

Then she was gone.

10

AN HOUR later, I stood at the top of the ladder in the end of the souterrain, peering through the peephole in the panel. I was looking into an empty bedchamber in the *harim* of Ahmed Aga, the chamber which had once been Selma Hanoum's and mine.

There drifted to me, from the *majlis*, the throbbing of drums and the shrilling of hautboys; so I knew there was dancing—that presently Lo Foo would dance before the *aga*, and if all went well, would enter that very room with him.

And so it came to pass. For presently the music ceased, and I heard voices in the hallway outside the door—the voices of Ahmed Aga and Lo Foo. The *aga* was saying: "This house is yours, my little dove. Choose from among all the rooms which one you will, and if it is occupied the occupant must vacate in your favor. But choose quickly, light of my eyes, for you have so fired me with desire that I am consumed with waiting."

They stopped before the door, and I heard Lo Foo say: "I like this room, my lord."

"It is the room of Salamah, my first wife," said Ahmed, "but she is fortunately visiting her mother. This room it shall be. Ho, Musa, guard this door, and see that we are not disturbed."

I heard the familiar tones of Musa, as he replied: "Harkening and obedience, *sidi*." Then Lo Foo entered, carrying a small bundle of her belongings. She was followed by Ahmed, who closed and bolted the door.

As I have said, Lo Foo had danced before me many times, but always in the silken raiment of her native land. Never before had I seen her in the abbreviated costume of a gipsy dancing-girl, and I was lost in wonder and admiration at the beauty it revealed. Glittering shields of beaded openwork covered breasts so perfect that to ornament them was like painting the lily. About her slender waist was clasped a jeweled girdle, from which depended a skirt of filmy black material through which the white gleam of her shapely limbs was plainly visible. Except for the customary bracelets, anklets and rings, she wore no other clothing or ornaments.

Perfectly imitating the sinuous gait of a gipsy dancing-girl, she walked to the *diwan* and stretched her slim, alluring form upon it.

His face aflame with passion, Ahmed began tearing off his clothes and flinging them right and left as if he would never want them again. When he had stripped to his soft, silken shirt and skull-cap, he hurled himself at the princess like a tiger springing upon its prey.

At this juncture, I could scarcely restrain myself from opening the panel and leaping into the room, simitar in hand. But because of the positive injunctions Lo Foo had put upon me, I refrained.

A moment later I saw why she had so instructed me—and marveled. As Ahmed came toward her, she rose to meet him, and grasping his wrist with both hands, turned and drew it across her shoulder. A downward pull on the arm, and a slight heave of her shapely back, assisted by the amorous *aga's* own momentum, sent him catapulting through the air. Feet up and head down, he struck the wall with his back, an impact that must have knocked the breath from his body. Then he fell in a crumpled heap upon the *diwan*.



Lo Foo quickly bent over him and struck him a sharp blow behind the ear with the edge of her hand. Then she signed to me.

I opened the panel and stepped into the room, followed by Tserin.

From outside the door came the voice of Musa. "What was that noise, *sidi*? Shall I break in?"

"Answer him," whispered Lo Foo. "Say everything is all right."

"We were playing at tag and overturned a chest, Musa," I called, imitating the voice of Ahmed. "Pay no attention, and keep good watch."

"I hear and obey, *sidi*," was the reply.

"Now, my lord," Lo Foo whispered, "you must quickly exchange clothing with this poisoner, for he may recover consciousness soon. Tserin will help you."

With the aid of the Mongol captain, I swiftly removed my clothing and donned the silken shirt and skull-cap of Ahmed. While we were dressing him in my garments, Lo Foo opened her bundle and busied herself laying out cosmetics and heating a small curling-iron in a candle flame.

When all was in readiness, she trimmed and curled my black beard, and then, looking from Ahmed's features to my own, applied deft touches here and there from her tray. Presently she held up a mirror before me, and I started back in amazement at the image I saw therein, for it was the face of Ahmed Aga.

Lo Foo turned to Tserin. "Take this carrion to the house of Hasan," she said, indicating the senseless form of Ahmed. "Shave off his beard, bind him hand and foot, and see that he does not escape."

The captain went to the open panel and softly called his two warriors. They came to the top of the ladder, and we passed the limp form of the *aga* to them.

"You may go now, Tserin," said Lo

Foo. "Tell Hasan Aga that tomorrow my master will call upon him by way of the front door, and I by way of the souter-rain."

He bowed low, and followed his men down the ladder.

Lo Foo closed the panel. "We must sleep now, my lord," she said. "Tomorrow will be a trying day, for with my help you must establish yourself as Ahmed Aga in this household."

"There is but one *diwan*," I said. "I will sleep on the floor, and you may have it."

"Why, it is a large *diwan*, and there is ample room for both," she said. "Yet if you object to sleeping with me, it is I who will lie on the floor."

"It is not that I object to sleeping with you," I replied, "but that I believed you would object to sleeping with me."

"Not at all," she assured me. "Why should I?"

"Why, er, it's not customary," I stammered.

"For a slave-girl to sleep with her master? Why, it is common practise, both in your land and mine, and has been throughout the ages. You yourself told me how the great and holy Daoud, slayer of the giant Goliath, and father of Suleiman the Wise, slept with a virgin when very old, to gain warmth for his aged bones."

Her argument was unanswerable, yet I knew that if I occupied the *diwan* with her, I should be expected to sleep. And I was certain that if Malik Daoud himself, in the years of his utmost senility, had this ravishing little beauty beside him instead of Abishag the Shunammite virgin, he would not have slept a wink, either.

"I am not sleepy," I told her. "Do you get some sleep, and I will sit and smoke."

"No, my lord. If you can not sleep, then you must rest, at least." Gently she

pushed me back upon the *diwan*. Seeing that there was no escape, I stretched out, turned my face to the wall, and closed my eyes.

With tender solicitude she threw a coverlet over me. Then I heard her removing her jewelry and bangles and placing them on a taboret. A moment later the *diwan* gave almost imperceptibly under the slight pressure of her body, and I sensed the gentle warmth and intoxicating fragrance of her, there beside me.

By the sound of her faint, regular breathing, I knew that Lo Foo soon slept. But I could not. Although it had been my intention to remain all night with my face to the wall, I soon found this a most uncomfortable arrangement. As says the old proverb: "All are not asleep whose eyes are closed," so it was with me. And though I counted sheep, goats and camels in my mind's eye, until I had numbered more of these animals than are to be found in all Arabia, I only grew the wider awake, and so fidgety that I could scarce restrain myself from leaping up and shouting.

Presently, when it seemed that my entire left side was dead, and that millions of tiny, tantalizing imps were fingering all my nerve ends, I found that I must turn on my back. This I contrived to do very quietly, and without touching her who slept beside me, blissfully unconscious of the agony I was undergoing.

What a relief! With a pricking like that of a thousand needles, circulation was restored to my left side, and the imps ceased to pluck at my nerves. Now, as I lay there in a little more comfort, I decided to give over counting sheep, and as sleep was impossible, think of the important things I must do on the morrow.

But sleep, it seems, is a fickle mistress. No sooner did I cease to court her, and begin conning my plans for the coming

day, than a drowsiness assailed me, and I passed into dreamland.

My dream carried me back to the old happy days when Selma Hanoum and I slept, side by side, on this very *diwan*. I must have turned on my right side shortly thereafter, for the dream ended, and I awoke to that elusive sense of reality which comes in a half-sleeping, half-waking state. Perhaps I had thrown my arm across Lo Foo in my sleep, for it appeared to be a tactile sensation, the velvety feel of her, that had caused my dream to vanish. Yet, somehow, I was not sure but that this was another dream. Dimly, I recall that a soft hand took mine, removed it just a little from the position it had occupied, and held it. Then once more slumber claimed me.

## 11

**B**RIGHT sunlight streaming down upon my face, awakened me. For a moment, I did not realize where I was. Then I recognized the familiar decorations and furnishings of the room that had been mine and Selma Hanoum's for many happy months.

Lo Foo had donned her native silken garments, and was combing her glossy black hair. But when she saw that I was awake, she sprang up and unbolted the door.

A slave-girl entered with a ewer of water and a basin. I made ablution and prayed the dawn prayer, after which another slave-girl brought coffee and breakfast.

When she had gone out, Lo Foo bolted the door once more. "While you slept, I had breakfast," she said, "and then went about, meeting the inmates of this house. Today, I think it best that you do not ride forth, as is Ahmed Aga's custom, to attend the Pasha, but send a slave to him, pleading illness. Many of the inmates

you will know, as the *aga* kept most of Selma Hanoum's slaves. But when you see one you do not recognize, stroke your beard three times in succession, and I will call that person by name, so you will make no mistakes."

After breakfast, I went forth into the *majlis*, and Lo Foo kept constantly at my side. "Remember," she whispered, "Hamed the Dragoman is no more. You are Ahmed Aga. Cultivate his mannerisms, speak as he would speak, and in private, copy his signature until you can duplicate it perfectly without the slightest hesitation."

Things came about as Lo Foo had predicted, while I marveled at her foresight, and though I feared that at least one of the slaves who had served me for many months would recognize me, none did so. Before midday I knew the name of every inmate of the house who had been a stranger to me.

Ahmed, I learned, had two wives, but fortunately, no children. The second, I triple-divorced that morning, paying her double her dowry and sending her back to her parents. The other, who was visiting her mother, I resolved to divorce upon her return. His hostlers, slave-girls and eunuchs, most of whom had been Selma's, I retained for the present.

That afternoon I ordered Ahmed's prancing charger brought out, and rode to the house of Hasan, resolved to deal with Ahmed himself. I would give him a simitar with which to defend himself, and felt confident that the will of Allah would prevail for the right.

Lo Foo, meanwhile, was to lock herself in the bedroom, then pass through the souterrain into Hasan's house.

**I** WAS about to dismount before my old friend's door, when I noticed a hooting, jeering rabble coming down the street, following four men who bore a

much bedraggled body on a crude stretcher. This sight aroused my curiosity, and I remained in my saddle to watch them pass.

As they drew closer, I saw, with a start of surprise, that the corpse wore the same clothing I had worn the day before, and greatly resembled me as I looked before I had grown a beard. The clothing was sodden, and water dripped from it into the dust of the street.

"Has some one been drowned?" I asked a camel-driver, who trailed along at the edge of the crowd.

"A vile malefactor has reaped his just reward," he replied. "The corpse of that foul murderer and wife-poisoner, Hamed the Dragoman, who escaped the executioner some months ago, was seen floating in the Tigris, and some fishermen just hauled it out."

Swiftly I dismounted, and gave my reins to a groom, who had followed me on foot. Hasan answered my knock, and led me into the *majlis*. Tserin and his two warriors were there, smoking their baton-like pipes, but Lo Foo had not yet arrived.

"Where is Ahmed Aga?" I asked.

Hasan looked at me slyly, and winked at Tserin. "Why, you are Ahmed Aga," he replied.

"If I am Ahmed Aga, then where is Hamed the Dragoman?"

At this moment, Lo Foo entered, and the three Mongols instantly bowed to the floor before her.

"What have you done with the prisoner?" she demanded. "Why isn't one of you guarding him?"

Hasan cleared his throat. "The base and inhuman monster has met with the justice of Allah," he said. "Last night when he was brought in, I recalled that he was the poisoner of my sister's daughter, on whom be peace, and that his blood-wreak belonged to me. I would have slit



his throat, but Tsetin had noticed a thriving young bamboo sprout in my garden. He reminded me that, through the machinations of this villain, my nephew came near to meeting death by impalement, and explained how, in Cathay, they have a singularly effective way of letting nature perform such tasks. The dog died before daybreak this morning, and we flung him into the Tigris, after putting papets on his person which would positively identify him as Hamed the Dragoman."

"I can not find the heart to be angry with you, uncle," I said, "though you have stolen the vengeance which belonged to me."

"*Waha!*" he replied. "We but made a bride of him, instead of a groom. He would have been groom to a tiger lily, but instead, we made him bride of a bamboo."

The three Mongols, it seemed, were not to get off so easily. Lo Foo spoke rapidly to them in their own tongue. It was apparent that she was furiously angry and they were very much frightened.

"Forgive them, Lo Foo," I said. "After all, the affair was more Hasan's doings than theirs."

So she relented, and after a pipe and a cup of coffee with Hasan, we returned to the palace, I on my horse, and she by way of the souterrain.

## 12

THAT night I sat in the *majlis* of my *harim*, an opulent *aga* with wealth, land and slaves, and the finest home in Mosul. Wearing rich silks and costly jewels, and reclining amid the soft cushions of my luxurious *diwan*, I was surrounded by slave-girls, eager to court my favor and do my bidding.

Behind a screen at the far end of the *majlis*, musicians were tuning their instru-

ments. And in one of the rear rooms, Lo Foo, with the assistance of two of my slave-girls, was spending much time over her toilette. She was to dance before me that night, her dance of farewell, for on the morrow she would leave Mosul for ever.

Presently I heard the tinkle of anklets in the hallway, and Lo Foo entered. Musa, the eunuch, signed to the musicians behind the screen, and they began to play.

Then Lo Foo danced.

Never before had I seen her so beautiful, so radiant, or so madly alluring. The key color of the ensemble she had chosen for that dance was red, the color of love. Her skirt was a tenuous, diaphanous material of a shade that matched the red of her lips, and was suspended on a girdle of cloth of gold, studded with rubies. Her breast shields were blood-red coral beads, woven on golden threads, and her anklets and armlets were gold, decked with figures of red lacquer.

The dance was one of passionate love—of wooing and of mating. Never had she danced thus before me, and never had I been so powerfully affected. The throbbing music, the rhythmic swaying of her slim, young body, and the matchless perfection of her face and figure, held me enthralled. Forgotten were my sorrow and my affliction, which had, up to this time, hung before my eyes as a veil, blinding me to the true worth of her who danced before me, to the fact that I loved Lo Foo—had loved her since first I saw her there in the slave mart.

Suddenly I realized that the dance was over. The music had ceased, and the little dancer had flung herself down before me. I caught her up, and she nestled in my arms like a tired child. But her eyes were the eyes of a woman, and they were starry with a light which a man, though he see it but once, may never mistake.

The fragrance of her breath intoxicated me like heady wine. Unmindful of the slave-girls and the eunuch, I claimed the sweetness of her lips. Her arms stole about my neck, and clung. Still holding her in my arms, I stood up, and carrying her into our room, gently lowered her to the *diwan*.

Behind me, Musa, the eunuch, closed the door.

Gently I unclasped the soft arms from around my neck.

"I can not remain here with you to-night, Lo Foo," I said. "I will go through the souterrain to the house of Hasan."

"But why?"

"Because I love you."

She clung to me, would not let me go, and again those starry lights in her eyes thrilled me.

"Stay, my lord," she pleaded. "I have always loved you. And now I love you so much that it hurts."

AS ON the morning previous, I was awakened by the sun shining in my face. Lo Foo, I thought, had gone out into the *harim* for her breakfast. For some time I lay there, indolently blinking in the sunlight, reviewing glorious memories.

But presently, as Lo Foo did not put in an appearance, I sat up. Then I saw a note lying on the taboret beside the *diwan*, and recognized the painfully scrawled handwriting of my little princess, who, despite my patient teaching, wrote wretched Arabic. My heart fell as I read the note. It said:

Beloved:

It would have been easier for me to pluck my heart, bleeding and quivering from my bosom, than to leave you thus. But a daughter's first duty is to her parents, and my dying father needs me. I can not remain to say farewell, for in your arms my will deserts me. So this is the only way.

Farewell, and may the God of your people and

the Gods of my ancestors watch over you. I will always love you.

Your broken-hearted,  
LO Foo.

I dressed hastily, and dashing out into the *majlis*, called for my horse. A few moments later, I was riding madly through the streets of Mosul. Presently I passed the city gate, and came to the place where the Mongols had camped. The circular places showed where the *yurts* had stood, but not a single peg remained.

For a time I entertained the insane idea of following Lo Foo's caravan. But reason told me that I could never hope to overtake the swift Mongol riders. And even if this were accomplished, it would only increase the agony of our parting.

Accordingly, I turned my horse, and sadly rode back to my desolate house.

TWO years passed, during which I sought forgetfulness by giving myself up to the pleasures which my great wealth commanded for me. Then, one day, a Mongol called at my house. He had come through with a caravan of traders from Cathay. After handing me a small parcel, he made obeisance and withdrew.

With trembling hands I undid the parcel. It contained a small, richly fashioned jade locket, and a folded bit of parchment. I sprang the catch of the locket, and there smiled out at me the features of a handsome baby boy, done in life-like colors. Unfolding the parchment, I read: "Thy son, and mine, beloved." There was no signature, but a royal seal held by its stem a dried and lacquered tiger lily.

And thus, *effendi*, there passed out of my life the rare and beautiful flower from far Cathay. But, though she was not a *Moslemah*, I have never ceased to love her—may Allah forgive me!—nor will I, so long as there is life within me.

Ho, Silat! Bring the sweer and take the full.

# Pirate Whelp

## By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

*A complete novel of Malaya, of a great sea battle, and of Siti Ishtar, the capricious Queen of Kota Sembilan*

**R**ANA SINGH, Raynor's Sikh *havidar*, or sergeant, appeared in the Residency doorway. "The Queen arrives, Huzoor," he announced.

Raynor, British Resident of Kota Sembilan, straightened up in his stiff starched whites to receive her. He tried to put on a stern frown, but he loved with a warm and comradely affection that pirate's whelp, Siti Ishtar, queen of this little Malay principality. She was the daughter of that renowned pirate chieftain of the Banggai Archipelago off Celebes, Haroun Mahomet, and was a wayward and almost unmanageable little ruler of her people. She did about as she pleased here—confound her! But she had been cradled on fighting at sea and her kris had always been sharp and decisive—and prompt—in any emergency that might arise in her kingdom. Raynor had sent for her to come over to Residency Island instead of calling on her ceremoniously at the palace. He always did that when she was in the wrong; a first law of Oriental diplomacy.

She appeared in the doorway, radiant, beautiful, easily the most beautiful girl of her race. She wore a gleaming golden sarong clasped in front of her bare brown thighs by a huge jewelled brooch. A tight knot of a gold and jewelled turban crowned her sleek blue-black hair. Her arms and bust were bare save for two circlets of pearls and jewels that covered her breasts and were held there by a sort of ornamental harness. She looked like something off the stage; but Kota Sembilan was still barbaric and colorful and this costume was real, traditional, having

its roots in immemorial Malay *adat* [custom].

"Why hast thou sent for me, my lord and my counsellor?" she asked, her delicate features all one friendly and confident smile as Raynor rose gallantly to receive her as the British Resident—four years he had been here now as the sole white man advising her.

He gasped at the sheer beauty of her. He was a big, burly man, unemotional, matter-of-fact; a bachelor, save for an occasional Malay girl who did not count. She was little, slender, her great brown eyes under arched pencils of brows dominating the smooth olive face with its piquant upturned nose—but beware how you crossed this savage little beauty, the pirate whelp!

"I have no choice, 'Ku," Raynor said, using the affectionate diminutive of her rank of Tunku. "This won't do! The Wardmans' yacht was held up by two of your armed proas. He's a big capitalist from San Francisco and is interested in tin. We can't antagonize strangers this way."

She seated herself on a huge divan near the Residency desk and flashed a quick smile at him. "I released the yacht, *Tuan*, didn't I? And at risk of my throne, too. My sea datus are very insolent people and will brook no interference from me. They must carry cannon, on our seas, where one meets Chinese junks and Sulu proas that will attack any ship unarmed. Also the yacht carried no guns—so he *should* pay something to somebody, shouldn't he?"

Raynor grinned at that naïve point of view. "The steel gunboats of my nation





*"In one lithe movement  
she had seated herself  
on Raynor's thigh."*

see to that, 'Ku," he told her. "It is forbidden for yachts and merchant vessels to carry cannon, with us."

"*Piu!*" said Siti Ishtar disdainfully. "Are my sea people to go unarmed like women, then? We have no gunboats, save them."

Raynor hesitated to press the point that Singapore had been urging upon him for the past year, to get this native Queen to disarm her proas by a *firman* [proclamation]. She, the pirate's whelp, would be the first to oppose it, and hotly! Besides, it would cause instant civil war in her little sultanate, her sea datus plundering

and burning all along the coast and finally landing to depose her as an unworthy ruler.

"No; but it must come some time, 'Ku," he said. "Wardman has complained to Sir John in Singapore over this hold-up. It was very awkward for me. I want him to develop some tin deposits here, and——"

Siti Ishtar smiled at him archly. "Also has the big white man a daughter, *Tuan*," she reminded him. "Tall and white as the lily is she! *Aaarh!*" she bared white teeth in a sudden ferocity. "I hate her!"

Raynor laughed easily. "Varuna? No

fear, 'Ku! Just what we call a flirtation. Who am I, a poor British Resident, to her, a girl worth millions?"

Siti Ishtar's eyes remained jealous. She could not conceive of a flirtation that did not lead to a natural result, however temporary the affair might be. She knew that Raynor was no saint, but a big and powerful man who took his love affairs where he found them.

"Hast never greatly loved a girl of thine own race, *Tuan?*" she asked him.

Raynor smiled reminiscently. "One, 'Ku. I've seen her somewhere, but dashed if I can place it. But the image remains so vivid. A little girl like you, 'Ku. But fair; short, curly hair, and a habit of biting her lip when excited or upset. Confound her, I've seen her do that, too!" he exclaimed with annoyance at being unable to locate just when and where. "But she's the girl of my heart, 'Ku! I've carried her image there ever since. Her eyes—blue, deep, burning blue, like sapphires——"

"Enough!" Siti Ishtar had risen in a rage. She didn't want to hear any more about this girl with the blue eyes, not she! She advanced on Raynor with her graceful bare arms outstretched to him, her eyes provocative, glowing with passion. There was vibrant tensivity in her tones and a pitiful womanly appeal as she came to him step by step. "My lord and my sultan, *why* dost thou not look on me?" she cried out piercingly.

"Why, 'Ku!" Raynor exclaimed, astonished. "Art not going to marry Ibn Yaïd? Lo, the Vezier has waited for thee these many years! Now that the Sultan Sri Adika is slain and you a widow, the State demands it!"

She ignored that. Her eyes flamed like opals upon him. "Thee I adore!" Her voice quivered hotly. In one lithe movement she had seated herself on Raynor's thigh and was clinging to him like a little

girl—but she was no child but a woman brimming over with desire.

"Confound it, 'Ku!" Raynor struggled helplessly. But Siti Ishtar was not to be denied when she wanted anything. "Really——"

"Give me—give me but one moment of thy love, my great white lord!" her voice panted passionately. She had undone the great buckle of her sarong and ardently she pressed her breasts upon him. "I'll marry Ibn Yaïd!—I'll disarm the proas—*anything!*"—she gasped hotly. "But love me—this once—the Queen begs!—*Aaahhh!*" Fiercely she clasped him. Raynor himself was by now in the grip of powerful sex emotions over which he had no control. No man could withstand this burner of hearts! He did not pretend to understand her; but, oh, well. . . . Fiercely he folded her lithe body in his arms. . . .

"**G**O NOW, *Tuan,*" said Siti Ishtar after a time. "I love thee not."

Raynor stood looking down at her, bewildered. She seemed happy, sated; but there was not a trace of love for him now in her eyes. And he had been seriously, determinedly, in love with her during those mad moments. Wild thoughts of resigning the Residency and reigning by her side as sultan-consort. . . . And now? What did she mean? Unfathomable this storm of passion so quickly subsided! He had been for four years Resident of Kota Sembilan, and he knew and loved this picturesque Malay people as few white men could. Ibn Yaïd, the Vezier, whom all her people had determined that Siti Ishtar should marry in state, had loved her patiently for years and was Raynor's oldest friend here. Together he and Ibn Yaïd had come through the rebellion that had brought him to Kota Sembilan as its first British Resident. Together they had seen Siti Ishtar, the pirate's whelp, come in

a state proa of Haroun Mahomet's and had seen her installed here as Queen to Sultan Sri Adika, that weak reed of a ruler. Together they had lived through the insurrection of Shaitan Sadud, who had looked on the Queen and tried to grab the throne—and her—only Siti Ishtar had slain him with her own kris. At Ibn Yaïd's right hand Raynor had sat in judgment at court while the Vezier dealt out justice. And together they had restrained the ruthless little Queen when Siti Ishtar would plunge into wars that would be disastrous and probably bring in the interference of the British government. And now, ruthlessly, the pirate whelp had had her way with him—though for some obscure reason that was not apparent to Raynor.

"You don't love me, 'Ku?" he asked. "Why——"

"I love Ibn Yaïd, *Tuan*," she said. "He that rescued me as a child from the burning proa! Lo, his eyes are as the eagle's and his beard a yard long!" she sighed raptly in the Oriental imagery. "I shall marry him in state tomorrow."

"But——" said Raynor helplessly. "After this——?"

"*Tuan*," she said, "once there was a Queen in Mistr [Egypt]. And the great conqueror, Iskhandar, came upon her and she bore him a son. I had never heard that they were married. . . ."

The legend of Cæsar and Cleopatra and the Cæsarion; even here in Malaya that story was known, but it was ascribed to Alexander the Great, that imperial Greek who had so left his mark on the East that every investiture of a sultan must have the seal of Alexander, the sword of Alexander, as the state insignia. Raynor began to perceive what she had been driving at in this tumultuous storm of passion launched upon him.

"Thou hast given me the White Raj, *Tuan*," Siti Ishtar smiled. "The Queen's

thanks! Lo, are not the English the greatest of all rulers? Thy child that shall govern this people when I am gone will be of that great blood, *Tuan*. It was my heart's desire, my great and good friend!"

She rose and extended her hand, that hand that knew equally the grip of the kris and the caress of love. Raynor smiled at her fondly. The barbaric little whelp! He had been had, tricked; but it didn't seem to matter. As he saw it, he had betrayed Ibn Yaïd and the girl of his dreams—both—by this mad moment of yielding to her. As she saw it, all that was nothing at all compared to bearing a son of his conquering race. It would be a good thing for her people. There would be later children by Ibn Yaïd; but the Crown Prince would be in part Raynor, the Resident, a governor of a race of governors. Nothing else mattered in the least in her naïve philosophy!

"Fare thee well, *Tuan*," she said, smiling radiantly. "In the matter of the proas, I will talk with Ibn Yaïd as to how it may be done. Lo, it is handling fire! At the least hint that my sea people are to sail the seas defenseless as women there will be *ankanan* [uprising]. Yet would I keep my promise to thee."

She smiled up at him saucily and was gone. Raynor stood looking after her uneasily as Rana Singh appeared to escort her out. How about Ibn Yaïd, if he ever heard of this? And then the child; it would be like her, but there would be variations from the type that would not escape the eyes of her people. Much she cared! The Queen did what she pleased here, and you saw nothing, said nothing—if you would keep your head on your shoulders!

RAYNOR turned to his desk and his work as the British Resident. Wardman, the tin capitalist, was in camp at the deposits Raynor had discovered up on the



Sunggei River. He had to be visited tomorrow with the formal concession papers, made out in the Queen's name by Ibn Yaïd. He would see Varuna again there. Raynor tossed his head with finality over her. It was true that he had lost his heart there once, but that was mainly because she was the first white girl that he had seen for two years, and who wouldn't? Big, tall, beautiful, but not for him! At the supreme test of danger, during that hold-up by the pirate proas, when at the risk of his own life and far overstepping his authority here as British Resident he had saved her, she had failed him utterly. The girl of his dreams would not do that. She would be there, fighting by his side, or Raynor would have none of her. . . .

The papers on his desk that claimed him next had to do with George Severance, who had a rubber plantation down near the mouth of the Sunggei River. Another old-timer, for Kota Sembilan, for the young American had been here four years. He was now importing crêpe rolls and other rubber-manufacturing machinery, his trees having nearly reached tapping age. His sister, Roberta, had recently joined him from Singapore, George's letter announced. He owed her a courtesy call from the Resident. Also a talk with George about defending his plantation in case a rebellion of the sea datus should break out. Oh, well, thought Raynor, stretching; he could make it by pony from Wardman's camp down the river trail to the Severance Rubber Estates. . . .

But in the back of his mind was still uneasiness. What would the girl of his dreams—if he ever found her—think of this "affair," as she would call it, with Siti Ishtar, Queen of Kota Sembilan? The strict, monogamous, Western viewpoint, narrow and unreasoning, would be hers. The East was older and more tolerant. "A man's heart may take a day's journey and

yet return to its home," was a Malay proverb. She must never know.

## 2

GEORGE and Roberta were at breakfast in the big bungalow of the Severance Rubber Estates when the first hint of civil war in Kota Sembilan reached them.

*Aieeee!—Aou-aou-aou!—Aieeee!—Wu-wu-wu!* A faint and distant wail of women's voices came from the native village on the Estates. A despairing wail, laden with lament, poignantly sinister.

"What on earth is that?" Roberta exclaimed, biting her lower lip with anxious perplexity.

"Don't know," said George indifferently. "Some one dead in the village, I guess."

"Can't be," said Roberta, prompt negation in her burning blue eyes. "I know them all, and there's no one even sick."

"Bit by a snake, perhaps," George was offering, when a heavy tread sounded on the bungalow veranda and Itam Nabi stood in the doorway. He was the village headman and the plantation hunter, who kept them supplied with fresh venison and discouraged tigers and such prowling vermin.

"*Ankanan, Tuan!*" grunted Itam Nabi in his reverberating tones of animal ferocity. "Because of the Queen's *firman*, the Orang Laut have rebelled. May dogs defile their graves!"

"We should worry," said George.

"Nay, *Tuan*. There will be pillagings and burnings all along the coast. Thy servant has mustered fifty guns in the village. Is there a dealing out of *ubat dan peluru?*" [powder and bullets].

"That shall be!" said George, rising in haste. "Does the *Tuan Besar Inggris* [the British Resident] know about this?"

"He is away in the jungle, *Tuan*. Rumor runs that the Queen is taken for her

foolish order. It is for each place to defend itself now, *Tuan!*" Itam Nabi shrugged his thick and bare black shoulders. He held up four blunt and horny black fingers. "*Ampat proa, Tuan.* They mean not well by us!" He pointed down toward the estuary of the Sunggei and the open sea below.

"Meaning four proas of the sea datu down there *now?*" George cried excitedly. "Good Lord!"

"May the pelted devil reward them!" Itam Nabi cursed with relish. "Lo, we wait but thine order, *Tuan.* Thou art Raj in this village!"

George cursed its fifty guns and the four pirate proas impartially. How like this country! It never stayed quiet long. You fought your way to a grown rubber plantation and ordered crêpe rolls and what-not, and then Kota Sembilan handed you a revolution that stopped everything! He was a business man and hated war. It interfered with work. To Roberta it was all a horrible calamity. That wail of the village women, still ringing in periodic outbursts in their ears, was poignant to her of death and pillage, of burnings and bereavements, of their being hunted into the jungle with barely roots for the existence of themselves and their little ones. It must not be.

"The Resident, George!" she said fiercely. "He must be found. He alone can stop this. He'll get a gunboat up from Singapore and land marines—where did you say he was now, Itam Nabi?" she asked their headman.

"Who knows, *Rani?*" the black Prophet grinned on her indulgently. "It is for us here to defend this plantation and our women and children."

"*Some* one must go find the Resident, no matter what else we do," Roberta urged. "You must know something, George—he's with a tin man up the river, didn't I hear you say?"

"Sure. With Wardman, Robby. It's about eight miles from here up the river trail. But——"

"Here's what we do," Roberta cut in. "You and Itam Nabi fell a tree, down the river as far as one will stretch across. That prevents those proas coming any farther up. You can hold them there with the village force. Meanwhile some one goes for Mr. Raynor. And the quicker the better."

GEORGE'S brown eyes sparkled on her with enthusiasm for her plan. There was at least a mile of the river below the plantation before it widened out to become an estuary. It was deep water from there down, so that his lighters could ferry rubber out to steamers off the bar; but that tree felled would effectually stop those proas from coming up here to close quarters.

"Takes a woman to produce a real idea, sis!" he answered admiringly.

"Me for that tree, some pronto!"

He talked rapidly to Itam Nabi in Malayu. The latter nodded his head. Yes, he knew of a tree.

"The blessings of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams be upon thee, *Rani!*" he beamed upon Roberta. "Swords out, *Tuan!* We go, and in haste! Thou with two score on the right bank. I, with men and axes, for a tree that I know. Thou wilt see it, *Tuan*, a great tapang, growing on a point. There stop we the owls, the cut-off ones. May Ailah not have mercy on their bones!"

Those two were full of action and energy now. George was already starting for the gunroom to serve out ammunition and possess himself of his rifles. Roberta laughed sardonically. How like men! To her mind it was equally important to warn the Resident, immediately; but so far she had heard nothing about that.

"Who's going up into the jungle?" she asked, following them into the gunroom.

George turned on her with indulgent impatience. "Honestly, sis!" he protested, "that's important, too; but this can't wait a minute, don't you see? Those fellows down there must be getting under way to come up here, right now. It's a race. We've got a big tree to fell. And even then a hot fight on our hands—muskets against ships armed with cannon. We need every man."

"Then I'll go find the Resident!" Roberta stamped her foot and her eyes blazed with resolution.

"You? Alone in that jungle?" snorted George incredulously.

"I suppose you can spare me *one* man, can't you?" inquired Roberta, and her voice was cutting.

"But I can't let you, Robby! Under no circumstances!" protested George emphatically. He was hastily filling a basket with bullets and small cans of powder and boxes of percussion caps. Itam Nabi was about to start off for the village with it, but he stopped at the tone of decision in Roberta's voice. Evidently his *mem* wanted something and was not to be put off. He grunted inquiringly.

"She wants to go up into the *ulu* to tell the *Tuan Besar Inggris*," explained George. Even while he was talking Roberta had possessed herself of their light Winchester and seemed not at all disposed to part with it again.

"Now by the Perfections of Allah, in Whom is no change!" declaimed Itam Nabi, "Go, *Ya Bulan-alam!* [O Moon of the World] And may Allah salute you!"

He seemed to assume that nothing could harm his *Rani*, but George gasped: "Not *alone*, Itam Nabi?" He yelped out the protest.

"Why not?" retorted the old headman practically. "Who would harm the Charmer of Hearts? Is needed thou to

lead one party, and I the other. Else would man-man run away in one of them."

There was logic in that! But George was distracted with fears for his sister now. "Thou art mad as *Mejnoon*, Itam Nabi!" he barked. "No man would harm her, true; but what of the leopard and the snake and the wild elephant? At least one, jungle-wise, must go with her."

"I want nobody!" said Roberta decisively. "You need every man, George, as he says. I'll take Sufi—and this," she tapped the Winchester. "Our big ape will give all the warning I need."

Itam Nabi nodded, his eyes on her adoringly. That ape was better than a man, the old hunter knew, and approved. "There is a fisherman's trail, *Ya Mata-bunoh* [O Eyes-that-slay]. Thou canst not lose the way! Come, *Tuan—Lekas-lekas!* [Hasten!]"

He had disposed of Roberta and her whole enterprise so summarily and with such unconcerned confidence that George gave in. They hurried out of the gunroom together, laden with rifles and ammunition. But Itam Nabi turned at the door for a last word.

"*Ohé!*—Wo to the *Tuan Besar Inggris* when he first sees *thee*, O Sword of Beauty!" he hissed through his one yellow tooth, grinning upon her obscenely, and was gone.

Roberta flushed. The odious old malefactor! She confessed a curiosity, herself, about this big handsome Resident, whom, the villagers were whispering, the Queen Siti Ishtar was in love with herself. But she hadn't been aware of him in precisely this light, so far, in her own thoughts.

### 3

THE unchained Sufi and set out with the big ape ambling along on a leash. Her thoughts were with George now. The village was noisy with wailing women



behind her as all their fighting men went forth to war. Only the fact that those Orang Laut proas would have to be rowed, heavy and clumsy as they were, upstream against a swift current, gave George and Itam Nabi what time they had to fell a big tree and block them from coming up. She smiled archly as she thought of that plan, her own. It was an effective one. How stupid men were, to let a woman's nimble brain arrive at that idea ahead of theirs—military measure though it was and entirely outside her own world of thought! Their battle ought to go well. The proas would be almost helpless in the current and fifty good muskets would be complicating things. They should save the village. The important thing was for Mr. Raynor to know and take action with his government just as soon as might be. One swift gunboat up from Singapore right now would save a deal of bloodshed and pillage. And he was the one man in all this country who had that much power.

Power! ruminated Roberta as she tripped along the river trail at a fast pace. The power over life and death; the sword of justice placed in one man's hands! So had ruled the sultans, here; most of them unwisely and tyrannically, due to the frailties of human nature. But it was always one man who had the power in Malaya. This Resident was a sultan, a beneficent one, but an absolute sultan just the same. The idea fascinated Roberta. All other doings of men paled before what this one could do. Men behaved themselves under his rule, or died swiftly. It was the ideal human government if a people could only be assured of the right man for sultan. Roberta had seen, with disgust, enough well-meaning presidents and prime ministers thwarted in everything they tried to do by the politics and machinations of lesser men. And there was only one will in all Kota Sembilan that even approx-

imately measured up to the Resident's, that of Siti Ishtar, the native Queen. Even she could only go just so far. Beyond that he could, and would, interpose a flat veto and back it up by the ships of his government. He must be a good man to know, this Resident, thought Roberta. So far he had been too busy at the capital to visit them on the Estate since she had come here.

That river path kept her rather busy. It had a way of dipping into unspeakable quagmires and then running through veritable tunnels of roots. All of it was dark green and dismal, unlit by the intense sun stopped far overhead by the jungle foliage. There were snakes, at which Sufi chattered and Roberta threw sticks until they moved off the trail. Once he had climbed all over her in terror and Roberta had stopped to scan the tunnel carefully—to become suddenly aware of a spotted leopard, crouched close on a limb ahead. One shot from her had sent him scurrying out of sight through the dense green tangle of the forest.

**T**wo hours. She must have covered nearly eight miles of it now, and was weary and steaming with the moist heat. She plodded on. A vast bend of the river appeared ahead, all open and covered thick to the banks with bush. Wardman the tin man's camp must be somewhere up there. That hill of scant scrub having a prevailing tone of red laterite she fancied must be his tin deposits. They always occurred under thin and dry bush and in laterite formations. Near there, then. . . .

Roberta took a drink from her canteen and pressed on. In her jungle kit of khaki bloomers and blouse and high-laced boots she felt rather secure against all small creeping things—quite mannish and independent. As a matter of fact she looked intensely feminine, in the soft brown collar of that blouse rolled back like the petal

of a calla lily and open down her bosom save where it was held in by a smart red kerchief. The brown topee, with the rebellious filaments of her hair crushed under its rim, added yet more of the feminine note. One might insist that her small, rosy face was a veritable picture under it; but Roberta did not think so, for she stopped hastily upon coming to the conclusion that she was near the end of her journey, drew out a mirror and a powder-paper from the small pocket over the curve of her right breast, and surveyed herself with misgivings.

"Boiled!" she ejaculated without enthusiasm. "I'm a fright! I simply *can't* walk in on them looking like this!"

A dab with the paper, several of them, torn hastily off the pad. A touch or two at the hair, which seemed to have an alarming tendency to grow stringy from the moist heat. Roberta gave a tweak to the tie and a final rub at the nose until it looked cool and dry; then tugged at Sufi's leash to hurry along. She was quite eager to have it over with, now, to meet, at last, this man whose power was so great in Kota Sembilan that he alone could save it from the horrors of a native civil war. Half a mile more! Well, she was doing a small part, herself, in this world of men into whose work she had plunged. She hoped that George and Itam Nabi had meanwhile been able to——

A VIOLENT series of tugs from Sufi had nearly yanked her over backward in midstride. The ape was squalling hysterically, and in one last frantic jerk had torn his leash out of her grip and raced yelling up a tree. Roberta stopped—to stand utterly paralyzed for an instant. Across her path lay, *not* a root but a great, long, scaly body the size of a pig's. And it was all moving forward, slowly, irresistibly, both ends of it lost in the dense greenery of the tunnel walls. The girl was almost un-

nerved at the mere sight of it, this pattern of gray and white and peacock-coal colorings that crawled with the hideous and timeless deliberation of the great serpents. She did not need Sufi's chatterings, in the extreme accents of fear, to tell her what *this* was—a great thirty-foot Malayan python. She stood aghast before it, utterly at a loss what to do, her eyes almost blind from the shocks of fright and loathing that were coursing through and through her.

And then the thing stopped and began to swell like a huge balloon, to flatten out, to show corded muscles under the smooth and scaly skin. It warned Roberta that whatever she was going to do would have to be done instantly. This huge python was looking at her from somewhere in the dense jungle. All his long body was tensing for battle, for that sudden and terrific lunge that would come crashing at her through vines and twigs and foliage as if they were so much paper. She leaped back and stood peering to the right into the green depths. That was the direction in which this section of his body before her had been moving. . . .

And in there—again the sense of sight left her eyes, blinded with horror! A long, straight column of black and white ran up and up a bare dead branch, as if clinging to it somehow like a monstrous caterpillar. It was the dead-flat straightness of it that unnerved Roberta, not a curve nor the ghost of a loop, just sheer muscle-power and the hold of the great belly-scales on the bark. She had seen the fighting end of that column of python, the drooping curve of a neck, the bony flat head with its expressionless slaty eyes looking right at her. A forked black tongue had spilled out, once, and receded, leaving a round black hole like a pistol-bore.

Roberta fought down an ungovernable impulse to turn and fly as if she had wings.

Not a bit of use doing that! Her mind vetoed it forcibly—his lunge would follow her quick as light and strike her headlong! And then the great coils of him would be upon her, loop on loop. Not a chance! Roberta's features set stonily, partly in fright, partly resolution. Her large and rather petulant mouth became a grim bow, tight-drawn. The rifle rose.

That movement was the signal for a sudden change all along the length of the boa-constrictor. What were smooth lines became on the instant rigid arcs. The soft crash of displaced vegetation ran like a whiplash in the jungle on both sides of the path. The section across her trail now curved in a tense bow. He was all set to strike, and was going to—when, she could not know—but soon!

Roberta whimpered miserably, spell-bound with fear, weeping with anger at her own utter helplessness and inexperience. This diabolical creature! Most of him was out of sight in the dense bush, and she dared not make a further motion seeking out his head with her sights. There was a huge tail somewhere in the undergrowth to her left, she was aware, because of a steadily increasing crescendo of snapping twigs, a sound of saplings and vines being grasped as in the bight of a cable. It meant that he was completing his purchase on something solid, and would strike with the loop of his entire body. She had but about a second more to live unless she did something to defend herself!

Blindly, scarce knowing what she was doing, Roberta leapt into action. She lunged forward with the rifle and pulled trigger with its muzzle not four inches from the side of that gruesome body across her path. The loud report, deafening in this tunnel, the smoke, the bewildering suddenness of enormous forces let loose like a released spring, completely stunned Roberta, bereft her of any capac-

ity to think, to act. Something like a battering-ram had crashed through the foliage at her. It struck her in the side and drove her into the bushes with every atom of wind knocked out of her.

She hung there gasping, the rifle held wardingly across her body with all the strength left to her two hands, her eyes witnessing with a stupefied horror the terrific and aimless struggles of that python. She had shot him nearly in two! That fact Roberta clung to as her one hope in her helpless agony of the returning breath into her lungs. It was not the bullet but the powder-blast of her rifle that had done the work. She had unwittingly done the right thing, the only possible thing. The force of the powder gas at such a close range as four inches had a rending power far exceeding any destructiveness of the bullet. The python's blow when it did strike her had not had a tenth of the force it normally would had he delivered it with all his muscle-power from the purchase of that tail. Right now the section across the path was thrashing about brokenly and all the undergrowth being torn and lashed with the tremendous thumps of his huge loops. The head and neck of him was lunging again and again, blindly, across and across his wound, striking, as an animal will, at the part that hurt under the instinct that the enemy was still there.

Roberta recovered her breath in great gulps, staggered back down the trail, and then with a low cry burst into tears and collapsed on the damp duff. She was utterly unnerved and miserable. The python went on lashing futilely. He would keep this up for a considerable time yet. . . .

## 4

**R**OBERTA watched him, shaking all over. Sufi from the top of his tree was keeping up an incessant squalling, but she was hardly aware of it; just a dull consciousness of some continuous noise,



Her eyes stared fascinated upon the python. She saw him slowly advance his long neck, all of it shuddering, across the raw and bloody wound—a great gap that had torn out his whole side and broken the spinal column. He was still trying feebly to reach this thing that was hurting him.

The sight braced Roberta up to try to end his sufferings. Rapidly she stepped forward, put the rifle close to his long head, pulled trigger and jumped back. Followed a wild thrashing of a headless neck. It flailed about with the force of a mighty club; then gradually grew quieter and was striking about somewhere in the undergrowth. Roberta was now screwing up her courage to leap over it and get on with her mission at a run, but then voices came to her ears through the jungle:

"This way, Sir James, I think it sounded!" A woman's voice, in a rich and deep contralto. It carried accents of poise, the voice of one entirely at home anywhere in this world. Roberta pulled herself hastily together, adjusted her tie, dabbed wildly at her tear-stained face.

"Righto!—Coming, Varuna!" she heard a man's voice answer. Jolly, it was, the voice of a big and well-fed Colonial whom no situation in this world could upset. Roberta quivered. Was that Mr. Raynor? And, "Sir James?"

"Goodness, he's a belted knight!" thought Roberta. "We hadn't heard about that at the plantation."

And Varuna? Who was this Varuna? She seemed to own Sir James, judging from the tones of her voice.

"Down this path, Sir James!" it was calling. "I'm sure that second shot came from here—and there's some animal howling."

"Just a bit, Varuna! I'd rather you wouldn't go any farther, y'know," the man was answering her with something of command in his tones. "A shot in the

jungle may mean anything. Wait a bit! That's a frightened ape. Take care!"

That last was an imperative order. Roberta fumbled hastily for a powder-paper and included her nose, her cheeks, and her eyes in one comprehensive and frantic wipe. "I'm a fright!—But it is he that I will see first," she thought, tossing the paper into the bush. She felt a bit more cool and refreshed, now. She awaited events with confidence.

And then a man came hastily down the trail. He stopped on the other side of the python's body—and stood staring at her, his mouth open with astonishment.

Roberta colored. She had never been stared at in quite that way by any man before. Most rude of him! she thought. She could not know that James Raynor was seeing in her own person that little woman with the burning blue eyes whom he had seen once before but forgotten just where, a girl totally unknown to him. All she saw was a large and somewhat florid Englishman with a close-cropped mustache who seemed bereft of speech and apparently was not aware of the impropriety of leaving one's mouth gaped open in the presence of strangers.

"S— Sir James Raynor?" said Roberta interrogatively, since the man seemed incapable of saying anything at all.

Raynor nodded, closed his mouth and gulped. "I say, y'know!—Most extraordinary!" he managed to blurt out at last.

His eyes were drinking her in avidly. Roberta drew back under the stare and dropped the rifle across her knees.

Just then Varuna came up. Roberta saw a tall and stately girl with large gray eyes, cool, clean, and stunningly dressed in a white Chinese eyelet-embroidered suit that must have cost hundreds.

"My word!" she said, the tones rich like a deep bell. She put her hand possessively on Raynor's arm and stood looking down on Roberta over his shoulder, a re-

gal lily, accustomed to being denied nothing that her fancy chose.

"I was coming with a message to you, Sir James," said Roberta. "But I had an—an interruption," she glanced down once at the gory remains of the python and immediately began to shiver uncontrollably.

Raynor had reached her in one leap and she felt his big arm about her.

"I say, y'know—you're done in, aren't you?—This brute of a snake—what?" He was mumbling incoherently and at the same time fumbling for her canteen. He tore out the cork with his teeth and applied it to her lips. Roberta gulped down a mouthful and then drew herself away.

"I'm quite all right, thank you," she told him, somewhat breathlessly, as her blue eyes glanced up into his. "It was nothing. The message——"

"Confound the message!" interrupted Raynor. "Mustn't talk of that just now, y'know. Here—have some more water! Or better—this!" He had produced a small silver flask and was unscrewing it hastily. "You're in no condition to talk, just yet, are you?"

**H**E FORCED the flask on her, then gave an appreciative "*W'hew!*" as his eyes took in the terrific ophidian events that must have happened here. None knew better than the jungle-wise Raynor what she must have been through. And no one appreciated more her courage in that ordeal.

"I *must* tell you, Sir James!" began Roberta desperately, for he would think of nothing and look at nothing but her.

"*Not* Sir James, please, Miss——?"

"Severance; I'm George's sister," supplied Roberta.

"Oh!" he offered his hand warmly. "My oldest friend in this country," he beamed. "Not Sir James, Miss Severance, but plain James Raynor, please," he

hastened to correct her. "Miss Wardman—er——"

He looked over his shoulder. Varuna was gone. Jealousy could not let her remain here neglected any longer. *She* had read Raynor's eyes, even if Roberta had not! They were alone.

"She *would* title me! Rather embarrassing, y'know. Any of our people would misunderstand and think me a priceless boulder——"

"But my message!" persisted Roberta, for the man was evidently quite mad. "Listen, Mr. Raynor: The Orang Laut have risen, all along the coast——"

"And you came eight miles, all alone, to tell me that!" interrupted Raynor, his voice glowing with appreciation. He did not tell her that he knew it already and was on the point of starting for Kwala Djelan to take action when her shots in the jungle had started him and Varuna investigating.

"And now I must be getting back," said Roberta. "George and Itam Nabi had already set off with fifty men to defend the village when I left."

"Oh, but I couldn't think of letting you!" broke in Raynor. "You must stop here and have some food and rest, first. I've got it!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Fact is, my saddle-bags are all packed, for I was on the point of starting off for Kwala Djelan this morning. You go down the trail a bit and I'll come. There's lunch for both—may I?"

He asked the question eagerly. Roberta looked doubtful. He was being most kind. But he seemed a whole lot too eager, to her maidenly reserve. Was he a philanderer, with his heart at the call of every pretty face he saw, and constant to none? There were queer stories about Raynor and the Queen whispered in the village—for the natives knew everything—and there seemed to have been at least something between him and Varuna

Wardman. Roberta was tired and worn out and raging hungry, but— She eyed him dubiously, the burning blue intensity of the sapphire in her gaze.

Raynor could scarce retain control of himself. He was longing to tell her, right now, that she was the girl of his dreams, the girl whose image he had been carrying around in his heart, certain that some day they would meet. But he dared not precipitate anything so rash at this time.

"I shan't be half an hour," he urged. "Must pay my respects decently to the Wardmans. Try to make them appreciate the gravity of this whole thing, y'see. Really, they ought to be back on their yacht, if it's already as bad as you have just told me. But, first off, we must see to you, mustn't we? May I?" he begged.

"You may!" smiled Roberta at him. His concern for the Wardmans had decided her. He was really the Resident, anxious for the welfare of every one, impersonally, who came into this native kingdom. She could trust herself—impersonally—with him.

He was gone with a cheery, "Right-o!"

**R**OBERTA coaxed Sufi down out of his tree, not without effort, and set out back for the plantation with the ape tugging ahead on all fours. She did not once look back at the python. That would remain as a grisly memory inseparably connected with her first meeting with James Raynor.

She chose a spot in the trail where a little runnel crossed in a deep furrow and examined its banks gingerly for snakes before sitting down. Itam Nabi had a saying that he who has been bitten by a serpent fears every rope—and Roberta could appreciate fully the force of that now!

Raynor came riding down shortly after. Roberta heard the rapid patter of hoofs in the duff. She looked up, to see not one

but two horses coming. The Resident was astride the foremost and riding as if born to it. Roberta always did admire a good horseman. She received him graciously.

"My syce's," explained Raynor, nodding at the second horse as he dismounted. "I couldn't think of letting you walk back. You must be done up. Rather!—I say, it took rare courage to face that brute of a python, what?"

"I *am* tired," admitted Roberta. He was unbuckling the saddle-bags now and she eyed them hungrily. "Can I help?"

"Not a bit of it, y'know!" retorted Raynor cheerily. "My party."

He seemed to grudge every moment his eyes were not on her. He fumbled impatiently with the lunch, and finally achieved a spread napkin opened out in his two big hands that was filled with sandwiches and fruit. He approached her on all fours, ludicrously mimicking a native table-boy:

"Deign to accept, *Ya Rani*," he said in Melayu.

Roberta laughed and helped herself.

"Famished!" she told him, her mouth full of bread.

"Rather!" He said no more. He seemed getting tongue-tied again.

"Aren't you going to eat?" asked Roberta, helping herself to another.

"Prefer to watch you, if you don't mind." He was nervous and nipping at his mustache with his teeth now.

"I do mind," said Roberta decidedly. "Don't be ridiculous! The lunch is over, if you don't pitch in." She made a move to rise.

"Oh, please!" begged the Resident. "I'll be good!"

"You'd better," retorted Roberta practically. "You've a long ride ahead of you to Kwala Djelan."

Raynor gave an enigmatical '*Mmph!*' and ate one sandwich. He was hesitating



between another and a ripe mangosteen, when——

*Brruumm ppp! — Brrummp-brummp! — Brumpp!* The muffled thump of gunfire came distantly through the forest. They both listened.

"Canon!" ejaculated Roberta. "I must go."

"Righto! And I with you," said Raynor, jumping up to buckle his saddle-bags.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Mr. Raynor!" said Roberta sharply. "Your place is at Kwala Djelan, as quick as you can get there."

"But, Miss Severance!" protested Raynor desperately, "you can't think of going back alone—*now!* The attack on your brother's village has already begun. Who knows how it will come out?"

"You can't help any, there," retorted Roberta unmoved. "One man more, that's all. There will be plenty to protect me. Don't worry!—And I'm off!" she added, seizing the syce's pony-bridle and mounting in one swing. "Don't be foolish! Go—I beg of you!"

He stood eyeing her uncertainly, worried, haggard with the mere thought of leaving her to ride entirely alone through this vast jungle. He was yearning to see her safely home, at any cost to his own duties and responsibilities as Resident.

Roberta was sensible of all that, but she gave him no time. A kick had started her pony moving. "Good-bye!" she called back over her shoulder. "Do go, Mr. Raynor! Quick as you can!"

"Wait!" called Raynor desolately.

"Well?" said Roberta, reining in.

"May—may I look in on you, y'know—soon, Miss Severance?" he asked.

"You may—Sir James!" she called back saucily, "But now—*go!*"

"You Americans!" ejaculated Raynor, grinning ruefully and shaking his head.

5

RAYNOR rode back to the Wardmans with his heart in a wild tumult. He had placed her, now. 'Way back at Singapore it was, three years ago, when he was part of the diffident stag party on the side lines at a Gymkhana dance. She had passed, on the arm of another man. Raynor, who didn't dance, had looked at her with a low whistle of appreciation, and that was all there was of it. Those intense blue eyes; her rather stern mouth; that trick of biting her lower lip; her vivacity, and somehow an air of fearlessness—they were all rather striking. His thoughts had been: "Jungle girl! I wonder who she is. Rather the one for *me*—my work up there in Kota Sembilan and all that!"

Most girls would rather not, thank you! It was loneliness and boredom for them. Immured in a native principality, with not a social doing on the horizon. . . . *His* wife would have to like the jungle, its gorgeous peoples, its primitive life, its preposterous intrigues and rebellions. She would have to have guts enough to fight by his side, instead of whimpering for protection, in case of native insurrection. That girl seemed to have all that in her, if one could judge character in a face. This python episode of hers had proved it, amply. No one person in ten would have survived it. Resolution, instantaneous decision, courage, the fighting will. . . .

Well, he had found her, at last. And she was George Severance's sister. . . . He had been too diffident to ask for an introduction to her. A bore, if he couldn't dance, she would view him. . . .

Varuna Wardman greeted him archly. "Who was the little beauty, may I ask?" she inquired with a lazy smile.

"Sister of a planter friend of mine," said Raynor. "They're having something of a row down there. The sea datus are

in rebellion and have begun plundering the coastal villages. You and your father had best get aboard your yacht, Miss Wardman. Anchor her under the guns of the Residency. I'm riding for Kwala Djelan to wire for a gunboat. It's the only way to stop this now."

She looked at him in some alarm. "You don't say it's as serious as all that?" she cried out incredulously. Varuna never could be brought to believe that this Malay state was anything but an opera bouffé principality, where picturesque things happened—but never anything that could menace her, the daughter of the American millionaire.

"Quite. I must start right off, if you don't mind," said Raynor shortly. "You'll pay my respects to your father? And I'd break camp immediately, if I were you."

"You're not going to leave us!" wailed Varuna. "Why, Sir James!" Her eyes were arch with reproof. "How ungallant! And what's going to happen to *us*, I want to know?"

"There's no danger inland," he said brusquely. "Just head back for your yacht. I'm leaving the Severances in far worse danger than you, Miss Wardman. Nothing counts now but to get back to the capital as quickly as I can. . . . Good-bye."

"Gosh!" said Varuna. She looked after him with consternation. Her dream of attaching the Resident as a latest conquest had vanished. Instinctively her thoughts turned immediately to her personal safety. Get aboard the yacht and get out of this, if there was such a thing as an insurrection going on in this terrible place! "Oh, Father!" she called out to where Wardman senior lay snoring in his tent.

**R**AYNOR galloped the twenty miles to Kwala Djelan, had a hasty conference with Ibn Yaïd, the Vezier; and had himself rowed out in haste to Residency Is-

land. He drafted a telegram immediately to Sir John in Singapore, requesting a gunboat here as quick as she could steam. He was about to hustle it off by one of the Sikhs when Ibn Yaïd himself was announced.

The tall Muntri, to give him his Malay title for Vezier, strode in and laid a brown line of knuckles on the telegram. "O thou, our father and our mother, the Queen begs that you do not send this *tar*!" he appealed.

Raynor sat looking somberly at the Faithful Servant, he who for years had waited on Siti Ishtar's caprice, patient, wise, enduring; indeed a native Abraham Lincoln, in the way he had guided this people stedfastly in spite of all the follies and wars and intrigues of their rulers. Their Sultan was dead, their Queen a widow, now. Ibn Yaïd was the logical man for Siti Ishtar as Sultan-consort. And Raynor had wronged him, unutterably, from the European standpoint. . . .

"I thought we had decided all that," he said. "This *tar*——"

Ibn Yaïd laughed: "We had, Huzoor. But I had not spoken then with Siti Ishtar—may Allah cherish her! Difficult is our Queen to counsel, *Tuan! La!* She did nearly drag my hair out by the roots at the first word of it! 'Ye men! Ye witless babes!' raged she upon me. 'Am I the ruler here or is that great Englishman stuffed with food? *Ya Allah!* How is our face blackened if ye do this thing!' So sent she me in all haste that you send not the *tar*."

Raynor laughed—and Ibn Yaïd joined him—over that picture of the rage of this fiery little pirate whelp whose will and whose caprices were the most difficult thing to manage in all the kingdom of Kota Sembilan. Then the Resident grew serious as he faced her Vezier under the strong lamplight thrown down upon

the Residency desk from the great Chinese shade overhead.

"As man to man, O Muntri, think not that I do not sympathize with you, and with her, in that ye hate any interference by my government of Singapore. But, how will ye subdue this uprising of your sea datus without any ships?"

Ibn Yaïd did not at once reply to that poser. Arab-like he was preparing his ground first. And quite evidently Siti Ishtar had said much more to him than that first outburst.

"In truth it would be an evil thing if we could not manage our own affairs, Huzoor. Also when the English warships come they stay, and there are marines landed; and lo, before one can draw breath, our government is but a plaything in a harem and the land is ruled by white police. Even as in Pahang."

His eyes drooped languidly as he made this home-shot upon the British Resident. Raynor acknowledged it with a sober nod. His sympathies with this picturesque people and their Queen were too great for him to contemplate with any satisfaction the inevitable taking over of Kota Sembilan, like all the rest of the Federated Malay States. It had to come some day, perhaps; but why not, in Heaven's name, let them govern themselves if it could possibly be done? He sympathized with that passionate patriotism that imbued native statesmen like Ibn Yaïd, their desire to manage their own troubles without white interference, to show themselves men in the manly art of self-government.

"How is our face blackened!" Siti Ishtar had said it all in one sentence there. The disgrace, the humiliation before all the native world, in that the Resident had to call in a British gunboat because they could not put down a pirate rebellion in their own kingdom. But

what they were going to do, practically, about it he could not see. All the naval force of Kota Sembilan had been these same sea datus, now in a state of *ankan-an*. He said so, forcefully, and to the point.

"*Aiwa?*" Ibn Yaïd smiled cheerfully. "Can not we, too, use the wire to Singapore? There is the Queen's father, Haroun Mahomet, with his pirate fleet of Banggai. A swift proa of a man that we know in Menado bears him our *lar* across the narrow straits, and within the week he will be here. *Yallah!* Then comes the Sword of the Faith, and within will be Siti Ishtar herself in the van of his battle. Soon and swift conquer we a submission! It is but to wait, O Presence."

RAYNOR's big frame sat sunk in thought as he considered this plan of theirs. To him it was ideal, to let the natives handle their own rebellion, to have Siti Ishtar with her father's fleet chastize her datus with a strong sword. That pirate's whelp was perfectly capable of it! She needed no help from his government's warships. Only——

"There's this, Ibn Yaïd," he said at length: "what do we with those proas attacking the Severance Rubber Estates right now? *That* can not wait, not even one hour! When I left the Sunggei there was sound of gunfire down by the coast. Who knows how it is, now, with young Severance? I go, tonight, to give what help I can. The Residency launch is ready and armed. The Sikhs are awaiting me this minute——"

"It is madness, *Tuan!*" cut in Ibn Yaïd, his voice quavering with alarm and disapproval. "What canst thou do in a puny launch against great proas armed with cannon? It is but to sacrifice the *Tuan* Resident and then we are lost indeed!"

"Say you!" retorted Raynor stubbornly. "Consider: the launch has two three-



inch howitzers. And there are a dozen Sikhs, with military rifles, whose trade is to fight. Knowest thou the range of those howitzers, Muntri? At three miles they talk; nor have those proas any speed compared to the engine of the launch. There will be a stern lesson taught to-night!"

Ibn Yaïd threw back his head and blinked his eyes sleepily, a characteristic Arab gesture of conviction yet disagreement. "So be it! Thou hast the power, *Tuan*. But, tell me: suppose thou prevail-est against these datus? Who, then, puts down the rebellion but the British Raj? And is not, then, the face of Siti Ishtar blackened? For thy launch is but a warship of the English to those datus—and where is then the Queen's government in Kota Sembilan?"

Raynor sat back grasping his chin with perplexity. The shrewd Ibn Yaïd had exposed the whole fallacy of his expedition if the native government alone was to handle this rebellion. A pity, not to hold his own cards in reserve, only bringing in overwhelming force from Singapore when all else had failed! How much more prestige would Siti Ishtar have with her own people if the fleet of Haroun Mahomet could put down the sea datus with a strong sword! And what difference whether a warship hurried up here from Singapore or he himself attacked them with the Residency launch, armed with long-range howitzers that could sink those two proas easily? But there was Roberta and his friend, George Severance—their protection could not wait upon any expediencies of native politics.

He shrugged his thick shoulders stubbornly. "Right, Ibn Yaïd! For the main rebellion we wait upon Haroun Mahomet, even as thou hast counselled. But for these proas at Kwala Sunggei,—it can not be! Remember when thou and I came here four years ago with the *Tuan* Sever-

ance, and the Sultan Mulei Suih was deposed and all this began?"

He waved his hand about the Residency office, symbolical of all that régime of peace and order and development that had started in with the reign of Sultan Sri Adika, the husband of Siti Ishtar, murdered later by the Rajah Shaitan Sadud.

"*Aiwa!* I do remember, *Tuan!* Also has the *Tuan* Severance a sister." Ibn Yaïd's eyelids dropped and the faintest of grins hovered on his seamed features as he eyed the Resident.

Raynor flushed slowly but admitted nothing. "Verily. And the life of a white woman is sacred, Ibn Yaïd. Were it the *Tuan* Severance alone we might leave him to his guns. He has Itam Nabi with him and a strong force of villagers. They should be able to defend themselves. But this white lady makes all the difference in the world. A jungle battle is no place for her! It is what makes this affair a matter for the English power, you see. Nay, it is determined upon!" Raynor said with finality and resolution.

Ibn Yaïd flung a fold of his burnoose over his shoulder and picked up his staff to depart. "Even so, *Tuan*," he said. "I go to tell the Queen your words."

RAYNOR saw him off at the Residency wharf and then turned his attention to the launch, which was moored along the opposite side of the landing. Under a smoky dammar torch that lit up the brooding jungle night his Sikhs were busy with ammunition and stowage. The howitzers had been set up on their naval mounts at bow and stern. They gleamed, cold and business-like, in horizontal glints of steel under the lurid flares. Ranjit Singh, the Sikh gunner, bent lovingly over the forward gun, crooning over it like a child as he adjusted its sight mechanism. There was the crack and splitting of wooden box-covers and the creak of

nails being pulled out as shell-boxes were uncovered on the wharf. The ammunition was being carried down between grunting Sikhs under Rana Singh's terse orders.

"All ready, there?" called down Raynor impatiently. "I give you five more minutes, Rana Singh!"

"Presently, Huzoor! There is a matter of provisions yet to go on board."

"Get on with it, then. We've no time to lose!" urged Raynor.

But soon there came a hail out in the night. A sampan emerged out of the circle of blackness, from the direction of the village beach.

"The Queen sends you fruits and meat, *Tuan Besar*," called the voice of the boatman. "Also is a *surat* [letter] for thee."

"That's well! Stow those provisions in the boat," Raynor called down. "Messenger, bring here the *surat*."

The sampan slid alongside the launch and her men began passing over three tall and deep baskets of native provisions covered with woven mat tops. Raynor gave them a mere glance and a brief direction to stow them amidships, somehow. They were horribly in the way—but one could not refuse any gift from Siti Ishtar—not with tact!

The sampan man climbed over the launch and came up the wharf steps with his letter. Raynor thought it some message of approval from the Queen as he went over to the flare to open it. And then, after the first glance at the inscription on it, his face set grimly. It was in George Severance's handwriting!

He tore it open and read George's hasty scrawl:

Come quick, old man—for God's sake! Roberta is taken: Kick me, if you will, but while we were holding them, down at a tree that I have felled across the Sunggei, a party of the pirates got around us and raided the bungalow. Itam Nabi with three men had gone back for more ammunition and they heard Roberta and the table

boys trying to defend themselves. They got there just in time to add four more men to their captives. One only got back to me. Afraid he will not live but he saw them carrying her off. Itam Nabi was with her. That's all the hope I have. Get here with the launch tonight if you possibly can. She is probably aboard one of those proas by now. I'm holding fast here, but damned if I know what to do next. They've got us, with her as a hostage. It's up to you now.

GEORGE SEVERANCE.

6

RAYNOR folded the message. Then, to the boatman: "Does Her Highness know what is in this *surat*?" he asked.

"How should I know what is in the minds of the great, *Tuan*?" whined the boatman. "A messenger came to the palace with it. They gave it to me to take out with this load of fruit. That is all I know, *Tuan*."

Raynor considered for a brief moment. No; it would do no good to send Siti Ishtar any return message. This was strictly a white man's affair. Also it gave him ample justification for interference, this kidnapping of Roberta. It was no longer a purely native row.

He went hastily to the wharf side. "That's all, Rana Singh!" he called down. "Cast off the moorings. The food the Queen has sent us will have to do. Make haste!"

He ran down into the launch. The rest of the Sikhs grabbed up their rifles and came tumbling after. There was crowding and confusion, hasty orders to soldiers who were starting to sit on those baskets to keep off them and range along the gunwales.

The mooring lines fell and the engine started. The launch gathered way and fled down the black reaches of the Djelan River. Rana Singh was busy adjusting her searchlight as they crashed through the breakers on the bar and turned north for Kwala Sunggei. They would need that searchlight, Raynor felt, when it came

to the talk he was going to give those datu!

His own thoughts as to the future were nothing but perplexity. How to use the long-range power of his guns *now*—when Roberta was aboard one of those proas as a hostage? That grim fact had shorn him utterly of his whip hand in this. It forced him to come in close, before even thinking of hostilities, lest she be struck down in the gunfire. And that would put his launch where two shots from those long muzzle-loading twelves on the proas could send her to the bottom.

"Oh, Roberta! Roberta!" he groaned aloud in his distress. "How in the devil? . . . Puts the wind up us, *this* does!"

He sat puzzling in silence after that outburst. Passion surged up in him as he thought of that enticing little figure, courage personified, who had faced him, rifle in hand, across the gory wreck of that python not eight hours before. The shock and thrill of that instant recognition when he had known her at sight for the girl of his dreams. . . . Meanwhile the launch was swiftly making the run up the coast. It biffed through the breakers off Kwala Sunggei and presently was winding up the long estuary inland. Raynor went forward to take charge of the bow howitzer himself. Two of those proas were now dimly to be seen, anchored several miles below the Severance plantation. Not a shot had come from them so far. Raynor could make them out under the lagoon stars, a lantern glowing redly atop the poop of each and faintly lighting up the long diagonal lines of their lateen yards.

He headed straight for the nearest. She was broadside-to, and held there at anchor by the monsoon breeze. The wind had at least turned her long twelves under the teak shield on the forecastle so that they

could not be trained on him. All she had bearing was two broadside swivel carronades. These were, no doubt, loaded with grape. But Raynor himself had shrapnel at his command, under one push of his thumb on the firing-latch.

"Stop the engine! On searchlight!" he ordered.

Its beams shor out ahead, lighting up the whole proa and the black and oily stretch of water between them. It revealed gun crews of Malays standing by those two carronades, turbaned gun-layers looking over the large round bore of each, the faint glow of touch-hole punks ready to use. And up on the break of the poop stood the datu, a forked figure of black and gold glittering in the searchlight glare. One of his tight-clad silken arms was outstretched. The drop of it would release both carronades at him, that gesture told Raynor. His gunners were but awaiting it.

FOR a silent interval Raynor just let the launch drift. This affair had come to the point of the gravest consequences to all Kota Sembilan if he did not do just the right thing. Those grapeshot could not fail to do hideous execution at this close range—perhaps one of them strike down him—and that would be the positive end of Kota Sembilan as an independent native state. And he, in reply? Well, he had but to press his thumb, and the datu Ali Sabut—Raynor had at once recognized him as the same one of the yacht hold-up—would be wiped out of this world with an instant finality. But nothing was to be gained by that, nor would it stop the two carronades. No; in force they overreached him two to one. The weapon of the mind was his alone.

"Ya Datu Ali Sabut! What folly is this?" Raynor called out. "Make you war on the British government?"



"Please God!" said the datu after the usual long and reflective Malay pause. "Our *ankanan* is against a tyrant Queen. We but took a white hostage so that you should not interfere, *Tuan Besar*."

"Where is the white girl?" demanded Raynor, not replying further to that naïve explanation.

Datu Ali moved slightly but did not lower his arm. Behind him on the poop Roberta came into the searchlight beams, little, compact, still clad in those khaki jungle clothes that seemed to become her so well as the girl who could shoot and ride. Raynor's heart gave a leap as he saw her. Behind her bulked the massive black figure of Itam Nabi, but whether bound or no Raynor could not perceive.

"Lo, she is my honored guest," said the datu placatingly. "And one was taken aboard with her whom we leave free so that no man may say or do aught that is displeasing to a white *Rani*. Only, the *Tuan Besar* understands, it would be unsafe for her to leave this ship in these troubled times."

Still the upraised arm, at whose drop those carronades would thunder forth on the instant. The datu was telling him, Raynor knew, evasively and subtly, that he did not propose to let Roberta leave his proa, now or any other time, nor under any threat of force. So long as she was on board force could not be used against him and he knew it.

"They are treating me very courteously, Mr. Raynor—don't worry!" called out Roberta herself at that juncture.

Her voice, cheerful, self-reliant, thrilled and reassured Raynor. Here was an American girl abundantly able to take care of herself.

"If my staying here will help you any—please let me," Roberta went on to call out. "I am armed, but he doesn't know

it. They shall not touch me so long as Itam Nabi and I live."

The datu had slowly lowered his arm during this colloquy in English. He did not understand it but he was inclined to be reasonable—and always courteous. But he would be adamant, if evasive, on his main point. His gunners had looked at him, once, and understood that it was not the expected order to fire. But Raynor knew that almost any injudicious answer of his would cause that arm to flash out again, and this time there could be no stopping the catastrophe of cannon-fire that it would let loose.

"Oh, Roberta!" He almost groaned in using her first name in the intensity of his perplexity. "What shall I say to him? You can not stay with them. Within the week the fleet of Haroun Mahomet will be here and you will be exposed to I know not what risks. I wanted to let Siti Ishtar handle this uprising herself—and she will—but your safety is above all else with me."

"And how about yours, Mr. Raynor?" came back Roberta quickly. "You and Datu Ali are like two duellists, each with the other's pistol at point-blank. Oh, please don't take such risks! Have a heart, Mr. Raynor!"

She was bantering him now, but Raynor heard, in the overtones of her voice, the anxiety that she was trying to conceal. It told him that she would do almost anything sooner than see him blown to bits before her eyes. And her next words confirmed it: "Never mind me for the present, Mr. Raynor. Get out of this, somehow, and go to George. I don't like this ominous silence ashore—not a musket-shot in the last two hours! They're up to some jungle trick on him—I feel it. There'll be a chance to get me off somehow. Who knows? Anyway, I'm safe

here, for the present; but you certainly are not! Please go!"

**R**AYNOR sat stolidly, with his hand still gripping tight the howitzer's firing-latch. Proa and launch had swung imperceptibly in the wind, but both the carronades and the howitzer had followed stealthily that movement, in a fixity of aim that was grimly sinister.

"I—I can not do it, Roberta!" burst out Raynor at length. "To leave you here—not a hope! And there is the principle involved, too!"

Then to the datu, with stern dignity: "I, the Resident, can consent to none of this, O Datu Ali! If you sea datus have this grievance against Siti Ishtar, just why you don't bring it before Ibn Yaïd I can not imagine. Is the Vezier not the soul of common sense and justice? But, if you choose to make war, that is between you and the Queen. It is rebellion, without even an attempt to adjust matters. And she will do well to put it down with a strong sword. In any case it is hopeless, Datu. I have withheld my hand so far; but within two days I can bring here a steel warship to which all your proas together will be but as nutshells armed with firecrackers. Take my advice and make your peace with the Queen's government while you may. I will see that you get justice. . . . As to the white *Rani* that you have there, it simply isn't done, Datu! To lay hands on her is to compel an immediate interference by me, one that can only end in the destruction of the lot of you. I demand that you send her out, *at once*, to this launch!" Raynor concluded with a forceful thump of his free hand upon the barrel of the howitzer.

The datu shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly. They were just where they started, each with cannon at close range ready to loose the minute argument gave

way to action. Neither man had moved one jot from his attitude. Raynor and his threats were nothing before those carronades!

"Get ready to jump, Roberta!" called out Raynor hoarsely. "Over the rail, as quick as you can make it, with my next word. I shall have to hand this swine an ultimatum, my word!" He was thoroughly angry now, at the end of his patience with this shiftless and evasive datu. "*Pileh!*" [Choose!] he barked peremptorily at Datu Ali.

There was a long and tense silence, while the Malay considered. When he did speak, it was more evasion: "Touching on our *ankanan*, O *Tuan Besar*, it is commanded that Siti Ishtar will take away our cannon——"

"*Choose!*" thundered Raynor, interrupting him with savage impatience—this was no time to talk of the *ankanan* and its grievances! And then astounding things began to happen. Behind him Raynor heard the ripping off of basketry mats and then Siti Ishtar herself stood beside him at the gun! He looked up at her once over his shoulder, gasping with astonishment. She must have known the contents of George's letter all along, then, and had invited herself on this expedition—in a fruit-basket!

"Who speaks of Siti Ishtar?" rang out the Queen's clear voice in the night.

The datu was visibly startled out of his calm Malay reserve. For an instant the muttered gasp—"Majesty!"—escaped him. Then a grin of triumph crossed his wrinkled features and he spoke a low word to his gunners. Instantly the muzzles of the two carronades converged upon Siti Ishtar and Raynor standing in the bows of the launch. Raynor could have kicked her for the idiotic tactical error of showing herself at such a time as this. But it was done now, nor could he think

in his bewilderment what possible motive she could have had in doing so.

"Her Majesty will do me the honor of coming aboard the proa," said the datu, again with hand outstretched to stay the gunners. It was a command. His tones scarcely concealed his triumph over having got Siti Ishtar so easily into the power of the sea datu. As a hostage she would be worth many white *Ranis*!

"Of course I'm coming aboard!" said Siti Ishtar silkily. "Lo, I, the Queen, go hostage for this white girl. It is as the *Tuan Besar* has said, Datu Ali, thou didst wrong to bring white people into this. And there is much to talk of concerning this *ankanan*," she said sweetly. "Start thou the engine, *Tuan Besar*."

Raynor's heart gave a leap of joy within him. Now he saw what she was driving at. If he were that datu he would as soon let a cobra get near him as Siti Ishtar! He muttered a low order to his Sikhs as the launch moved forward under a few kicks from the motor. The barrels of the carronades stood out over them now. They could not be depressed enough to aim. There were low mutters of exultant triumph on deck as the trap-door in the proa's bamboo netting raised. For an instant Siti Ishtar stood glittering in her golden court sarong in that fierce whiteness of the searchlight's glare against the proa's side. Then she was climbing up, with Raynor close beside her.

Fierce curses of denial met his head emerging through the bamboo netting. Raynor blocked with a burly shoulder the attempts of two Malays to stamp down the trap-door upon him—and then he had emerged into action already furious on deck. The datu, stabbed by Siti Ishtar's swift kris, lay writhing at her feet.

Beyond her stood Roberta, holding off with drawn revolver a *serang* crouching for her with naked kris. Raynor's fist

shot out and floored yet another rushing for her along the taffrail. Behind him were crowding Sikhs and yet more Sikhs up through the trap-door. Rana Singh's rifle exploded violently close beside him; then he saw Itam Nabi leap for Roberta's assailant and that *serang* crashed to the deck with the burly black atop of him.

THE proa's crew had already given back toward the waist from the poop. They had lost their datu and both his officers in that first struggle. Sikhs continued to pour up through the trap-door, firing as they came. For a moment the Orang Laut were driven headlong in full retreat; then a shout of battle arose from among them and muskets swung out in ranks of long and fantastic barrels.

"*Allah!—Allah!—La illahi illa AL-LAH!*" It crashed out like the roar of tigers, that *sorak*! There must be at least fifty fighting men of the Orang Laut left on this proa, and they would fight for their ship to the last man. He had no time to give the order, "Fix bayonets!" before their fire had lashed out in withering sheets of flame and they charged in a body down the deck. The Sikhs met them with the rapid crashes of their Enfields; then there was a furious *mêlée* below, clubbed muskets, krisses, spears. Raynor had whipped out his revolver. He and Roberta were firing below from the poop as fast as marks could be distinguished. It was a breathless, deadly, and wholly terrifying moment. The lives of all of them hung in the balance at that instant. Raynor's Sikhs were being overpowered three to one.

"Down!—*Into* them!" yelled Siti Ishtar. She and Itam Nabi leaped off the poop, and after them jumped Raynor's big body, his fist and clubbed revolver busy. They were instantly in a grunting and rabid hurly-burly of whirling and striking



men, a confused hubbub of individual fights between bearded Sikhs and fierce Malays stabbing with the flashing and snaky kris. Groups of twos and threes fought shoulder to shoulder. Into it Siti Ishtar was boring like a pestilence, her gold-handled kris dealing swift death before her. Raynor found himself confronted momentarily by a big and burly pirate with javelin poised not six feet from him. For a second he could see nothing for it but the blade of the thing through him, and then a revolver exploded close beside him and the man fell, his spear clattering on deck.

"My last cartridge!—*Give* me something!" gasped a hot voice in his ear. It was Roberta's. Raynor marvelled at the concentrated ferocity in her tones. What furies women were, when it came to life and death for their loved ones! They could fight more bitterly than men—once aroused to it. She and Siti Ishtar would take this proa single-handed if not stricken down! Delirious with the red madness of battle himself, Raynor leaped for that spear and gave it to her and they both closed up behind the Queen. The onset of the three of them had given the Sikhs the advantage. Slowly the whole mass of men was giving back; then there was a last furious rush and the Orang Laut fell back toward the house-on-deck around the mainmast.

"Halt!" rang out Siti Ishtar's imperious voice. Raynor instantly seconded it with his own shout of command that stopped his Sikhs in their tracks. Siti Ishtar had grabbed Itam Nabi, who was about to charge like a wild beast into the rearguard of the Orang Laut. Space opened out between the two parties.

Into it stepped the pirate's whelp, alone. Raynor uttered a murmur of protest, for any reckless javelin from among them could strike her down. But Siti Ishtar was not afraid of them, not she!

"Yield ye, my Orang Laut!" she said sweetly—yet compellingly. "Of what use to die, to the last man?"

Wondrous, the persuasive power of the human voice! There was not a trace of anger in Siti Ishtar's, only compassion and friendliness, tones that stilled the tempest in men's hearts by their mere quality. Besides, Raynor saw, it was of Siti Ishtar herself that they were afraid, more than of him and all his Sikhs. Those who opposed her died with a suddenness. Did she not slay Shaitan Sadud, the redoubtable war rajah, with her own hand? And lo, now their own datu Ali Sabut—and about half of their people besides.

A LEADER stepped forth from the Orang Laut. "Before Your Highness all tremble, *Ya Siti Ishtar*," he quavered. "But is it justice to take away our weapons and our cannon, so that we must put on slendangs and become women? Not us, the free Orang Laut of the high seas! Yet so says the Queen's *firman*."

Siti Ishtar laughed richly, a tinkling and tolerant laugh such as one would use to children. "Not I! Consider: am I not myself the daughter of the greatest of the Orang Laut? Was I not born and raised on the sea? Lo, before I was ten I had slain my man in battle, on the proa of Haroun Mahomet. *Never* would I disarm my own Orang Laut!"

That announcement was received with bewilderment. "But thy *firman*, Majesty?" asked the old chief in perplexity.

"*Sahyab!* The *firman*!" Siti Ishtar wrinkled her nose and her eyes sparkled mischievously. She gave a sidelong glance at Raynor and said: "*When* does my *firman* say that ye disarm, O fool?"

The poisonous little double-crosser! Raynor thought hilariously. Ibn Ya'id had drawn up that *firman*, but the Queen had put her own spoke in it—which was

to leave it delightfully uncertain and indefinite just when this disarmament was to take effect! It would suit the dilatory Malay temperament exactly, if explained.

It worked here. "Your krisses, my warriors!" Siti Ishtar demanded, and they clattered before her on the deck.

Raynor turned to Roberta with a huge sigh of relief. This much of the insurrection was over at any rate! The trouble would be to get hold of the rest of her Orang Laut, none of whom had read the *firman* with any patience, let alone scanning it closely for the catch in it. Siti Ishtar had also forsworn her promise to Raynor with that catch—which meant just what she had said, "Never." But it didn't matter. . . . They weren't ready for it yet, as a matter of fact, nor would be for a period of some years. He had been too precipitate, worried into it by Wardman's complaints. Siti Ishtar, the pirate whelp, knew better! And she had fixed it, in her own way.

Raynor came out of his thoughts as Resident to become aware that Roberta's burning blue eyes had dropped shyly before his gaze. Instantly the lover in him had returned and was ablaze. "You!" he said, his voice low, vibrant, tense. "We jolly well beat 'em, didn't we?"

His eyes were telling her his admiration, his longing; but his tongue was taking refuge in the fight. Some time, soon, he would ask her the momentous question—but he dreaded it.

Roberta, too, took refuge in the fight. "Thank you for the rescue, Mr. Raynor," she said somewhat breathlessly and kept on looking down at the deck. Her own eyes would betray her if she raised them. "Thank God you came through it alive—you, the Resident! . . ."

"Roberta!"

She raised her eyes to him, then. They stood a moment, holding themselves back by main force of will. No; not here. . . .

Siti Ishtar cast Raynor an arch smile over her shoulder as her Orang Laut knelt around her feet.

"Is this your She of the sapphire eyes?" was her unspoken question.

Raynor returned her glance in the affirmative. He was drunk with happiness.

7

THE fleet of Haroun Mahomet had arrived. The rebellion was still on. It had waxed and grown, rather, into a squadron of all Siti Ishtar's sea datus under one, Redjal-ed-Dem, the Man of Blood, who styled himself Sultan and had been altogether glad of her *firman* as an excuse to try to depose her and seize the throne of Kota Sembilan himself. These intrigues were always breaking out in native principalities.

Raynor sat puffing a cigar and looking out the open Residency windows at that gay and bizarre spectacle of fifteen war proas anchored in a long line between Residency Island and the village beach of Kwala Djelan. They were the size of ordinary trading schooners, but were Celebes craft with outlandish and gaudy superstructures, with long poops of red lacquered bamboo and deck-houses of gilded teak, with tripod masts of bamboo having immensely long and rakish lateen yards pendant from their yokes. There was color everywhere; wild and barbaric, greens, yellows, pinks, silver and gold leaf. Their sheer strakes swept forward to the inevitable flare at the bow for long cannon platforms with slanting teak shields over their muzzles. Compared with them, in their fluttering drapery of huge Arabic flags, the Wardmaos' white yacht, anchored off Residency Island for the protection of its guns, seemed some pale creation of a cold-blooded age.

Ashore the village of Kwala Djelan was full of noise and war-like activity.

Parties of warriors had been pouring into town, sent by all the datus of outlying villages in the jungle. Raynor could hear from the mosque the full-throated chant of men singing in unison:

"Upon them! Upon them! *Allah il Akbar!*  
May the foe fall in swaths before our swords!  
Upon them! Upon them! *Allah il Akbar!*  
May our spears drink at their hearts!"

A shattering surprise had Siti Ishtar, the pirate's whelp, prepared here for her rebellious sea datus. Their fleet had been reported as moving up the coast, burning and pillaging as they came. Messenger after messenger had come staggering into the palace, locating them to Siti Ishtar as off Pulo Putih, off Ras-et-Tin, off Kwala Maras. But they had no inkling that the fleet of Haroun Mahomet was here. Raynor had met him officially when that bizarre fleet, none of them over seventy tons and none armed with anything but brass muzzle-loaders and iron carronades taken from clipper ships long ago, had sailed in over the bar two days ago. The father of Siti Ishtar was a grave and dignified Bugis Malay, tall for his race, regally dressed in sarong and turban, with no sign of a lifetime of war about him save one huge and deep scar that ran from his pointed chin to the jowl of a bronze and obstinate jaw. It was this great sire who had given Kota Sembilan the pirate whelp born and raised on the sea.

Raynor meditated over his cigar on his course of action this day. It was to sit tight and do nothing. The Residency launch was ready and armed with her two three-inch naval howitzers, but he did not propose to use her except in emergency. Urgent telegrams to the Governor-General from him had begged that the British power in no way should interfere with this. It should let the Queen's own government put down the rebellion of her Orang Laut unaided. It was the only fair thing to do. If Siti Ishtar and Ibn Yaïd

were to be anything but figureheads they should be allowed to handle this alone.

**R**ANA SINGH, the *bavildar* of Raynor's Sikh guard, presented himself at the office door. "The Queen arrives, Huzoor," he announced, saluting stiffly.

Raynor got up in his starched whites to receive her. She had come, not in the state barge, but in a small sampan, which meant that her visit was to be private and confidential. The Resident expected something of a farewell talk, for this was the eve of battle and he might never see her alive again. He was formulating words of encouragement and of policy, in case anything should by any chance happen to her and it be necessary for him to carry on the government, alone or with Ibn Yaïd, when Siti Ishtar entered and the door was closed behind her.

"Greetings, 'Ku!" said Raynor, advancing cordially with outstretched hand. "You have a jolly breeze for it, my word! Take them on the inshore tack, so you have them on the skyline, if I may make a military suggestion."

He had never seen her looking so lovely, Raynor thought, her rich olive skin radiant with health, her almond Malay eyes like glowing brown stars, her delicate features, with the sleek black hair done tight under some kind of jewelled tiara, ablaze with resolution and excitement. She wore nothing but a filmy silk slendang over her bare shoulders, a tight-girdled sarong with a handsome gold-handled kris stuck in its sash, and over her breasts two metal, jewel-studded circlets, held there by a silver harness over her shoulders and fastened down at the waist. That scanty dress gave her supple body the utmost of freedom, daughter of the sun that she was. Raynor eyed her somberly, for the fate of her kingdom hung in the balance of war this day.

"Jewels remain when empires vanish,



"O *Tuan Besar!*" said Siti Ishtar gayly, noticing his eyes on her ornaments. "Yet fear we not. Who can prevail against Haroun Mahomet? May the protection of Allah encircle his sword! Lo, he has given me five ships; and there are those that we took at Kwala Sunggei."

Raynor nodded. That event was hardly a week old, when Siti Ishtar had almost single-handedly captured the proa of the datu Ali Sabut and Raynor himself had rescued Roberta Severance from her. George and Roberta were at that moment over on the Wardmans' yacht. Raynor had advised their being somewhere near the Residency until this pirate rebellion was over. He had said no word of love to Roberta yet. But they had found each other—in the heat of battle aboard that proa. The whole incident was now a cherished memory with Raynor. How like a tigress Roberta had fought by his side that night! And then her eyes, wordless, but telling him all, in the moment of victory! He could afford to wait.

"Jolly good, Your Majesty!" Raynor replied to Siti Ishtar. "As I said before, try to get inshore of them. You'll find that shots tell more heavily when the other fellow is on the horizon—and most of his miss you."

"The Queen's thanks, *Tuan!*" said Siti Ishtar archly. "I have used that trick before, when the dhows from Oman came upon us off Pulo Nias. Also"—she hesitated and the smile left her smooth features—"should we not prevail, thou wilt not see me alive again, great white friend!"

Raynor's whole big body moved with negation. Unthinkable! But she insisted with a gesture: "Nay, *Tuan*, it might be. Therefore have I written this *firman*. It gives the government to thee and the English power. I would have it so. Nay!"—Raynor was murmuring further protests

at her solemn mien—"there will be nothing but civil war among a dozen upstarts claiming connection with the House of Menangkabau if you do not do this thing. I and Haroun Mahomet are left, now that the Sultan Sri Adika is slain."

Raynor took with a bow the yellow silk *firman* studded with the great silver chops of the State that she handed him. It left him sole ruler in Kota Sembilan.

"Let's hope nothing of the kind occurs, 'Ku!" he said cheerily. "Also there is this: could not I, alone, intervene at the last moment?—Not with power, but with words," he hastened to add as an almost startling glare of ferocity shot into the Queen's eyes. "Consider: These are the sailor folk of Kota Sembilan that you shoot down, 'Ku. Their grievance is that you intend to disarm them . . . some day. It was all my fault, really. . . . Suppose I go down the coast in the launch and just try to talk some sense into 'em?"

Siti Ishtar tossed her head. "So counselled Ibn Yaïd. But ye two are soft-livered in this. There is a time for words and a time for the sword. After the battle, yes; let be! But now—an armed rebellion put down with words will not stay quiet long, *Tuan Besar!* There be hotheads whose blood needs cooling. There always are."

RAYNOR acknowledged the justice of that. Perhaps she was right. After the first heavy encounter would be the time for him to intervene. Human nature was always like that when men's fighting blood was up. Still Siti Ishtar lingered. She had something more to tell him, and it was the real object of this visit, Raynor divined. He could see an unusual coming and going of sampans out to the fleet through the Residency window. It was evident that she would be wanted on board right soon. Yet she was waiting, temporizing, ignoring his hints

that the fleet was about to get under way out there.

And then a delicate rose flush appeared in the olive on her cheeks, a charming and most feminine blush, and she was looking at him slantwise out of narrowed eyelids.

"It has happened, O *Tuan Besar!*" she told him in a scarce audible whisper. "My moon has passed, and—nothing."

Raynor was struck rigid where he stood. Curious sensations, of tenderness, and somehow of pride, tingled through him. He knew perfectly well what she meant; that that moment of passion of theirs had borne fruit.

"The Thee in me, it lives, my Sultan!" said Siti Ishtar with rising fervor. "Oh, I can not tell you my joy!"

Raynor gulped and nodded. Dear to him, this news made Siti Ishtar. He could never love her as he did Roberta Severance; yet this sin of theirs, as some parts of the world would view it, had established a bond between them that was strong as life.

"And Ibn Yaïd?" he asked, his voice low and husky and breathless with emotion. "I—I have not heard yet from the mosque of any state marriage banns."

She was looking at him fixedly, her eyes like stars upon him. "No," said Siti Ishtar, a low and distinct and final note like a bell. "Never! Never shall my womb bear aught after *him!*"

Raynor gasped. Not marry Ibn Yaïd! . . . Capricious—was Siti Ishtar! This last obsession of hers would lead them he knew not where. Every cherished idea of the Western world, honor, chastity, good name, life above the breath of scandal, was shattered to bits by it.

"But—but—the—the proprieties, 'Ku!" he exploded. "This can not be! Can the Queen bear a son and have no husband? And you promised me!"

"*Tuan,*" said Siti Ishtar, and her voice sang with the exaltation that possessed

her, "there was that great Queen in Egypt—she who was beautiful as the immortal hours of paradise. The great conqueror, Iskhandar, came upon her and she bore him a son. Yet was she proud that it be so, and her son became a mighty ruler in his own country."

"A true tale, 'Ku, and not without honor," Raynor agreed. "But, if you do this thing, you break Ibn Yaïd's heart. Are all his years of devotion nothing? . . . Or, is it—me?" He asked her that, hoping sincerely that there was not yet more cruelty to her to come, the agony of an unrequited passion, a hopeless infatuation that would be misery to them both. But her quick smile relieved any apprehensions there: "*Ptu!*—I love thee not, *Tuan!* Gratitude, more than I can ever tell thee, yes! But *him* I love! *Him* I shall dote upon! My kingling! He who shall be greater than all the princes who have ever ruled in Malaya! *Aacha!* Scarce can I wait for him to grow up and take this pestilent government off my shoulders——"

SILVER trumpets ringing out from the proas and a gun fired interrupted her. Siti Ishtar stepped forward impulsively and wrung the Resident's big hand. Her eyes were warm with an emotion that was stronger than friendship, yet less—far less—than the love in her that was now all turned inward. "Enough!—Farewell! It is for *him* that I fight, great white friend! Trust thou, it will be strong battle!"

She was gone, leaving Raynor stunned. What was going to happen? And how manage this caprice of hers? He could not help but feel a fond interest in this son of his who was going to be such a native Sultan as Malaya had never seen. That ruthless little queen with her woman's wiles had had her way with him in this; and, in a large view, it was

a fine thing for this native state of Kota Sembilan. The people would accept her prince as something of a miracle, or at any rate a thing not to be questioned; for their idea of a good Sultan was one who in his wisdom did just as he pleased, and those who demurred died of a swift sword. But this idolizing, deifying rather, the Rajah Muda by his queen-mother to the extent of remaining for ever single, struck at the hearts of two people more than dear to Raynor; his devoted native friend, Ibn Ya'ïd, and his adored Roberta Severance. How explain himself with them? The Arab would accept nothing miraculous about Siti Ishtar's son. He had a swift vision of Ibn Ya'ïd standing in this very room with two simitars in his arms—and one of them would not leave that room alive! And Roberta?

Raynor clapped his palms together, shook his big and burly figure like some mastiff that has been enduring a rather bad time of it. He went out on the veranda to watch Haroun Mahomet's fleet get under way. And, after one long stride, he stopped as if smitten by some invisible blow—for out there were sitting Roberta and George Severance, with Itam Nabi squatting beside his *Mem!* A violent and purple flush spread itself over all Raynor's heavy features—he could fairly feel his face sizzle. They must have overheard every word of that talk between himself and Siti Ishtar! Rana Singh had not announced their arrival. . . .

Raynor went over to the veranda rail and watched for a moment that small sampan bearing Siti Ishtar coming alongside a huge and gaudy war proa. Her mastheads bore a string of silver crescents and globes on iron rods jutting up from the yokes of the tops—insignia of a flagship of one of the divisions. . . . He noted it, as he did everything else that was significant in native and Mohammedan customs.

He waited for his face to cool, then turned to George Severance.

"Glad you came over, old man!" He greeted him with an uneasy smile. "Best to be here at the Residency until we all see how this is coming out, isn't it? Your old room, dear chap; and I'll have one got ready for Roberta."

George was looking at him queerly. Half angry, wholly puzzled was the expression on his handsome features. He did not know just how he stood on this, as Roberta's brother.

"Thanks," he said, and there was a certain constraint in his voice, not at all the cordial accents of Raynor's old friend, George Severance. "Wardman's clearing out," George went on explanatorily. "The yacht is unarmed and he felt that she might be an embarrassment to you with this pirate battle coming on. But we decided that we ought to stick with you no matter how it goes. . . . So we came over . . . yacht's boat——" He had stopped because there were far weightier things on his mind than this.

Raynor knew he was in for it. He steadied himself and said: "Right! Roberta——" Raynor forced a smile as he turned to her.

"Miss Severance, please—Mr. Raynor," Roberta corrected him coldly. She had cut short his very first sentence to her. Her face was like death, the large and burning blue eyes filled with a terrible emotion, her large mouth set by a strong will, yet quivering slightly. Her skin was so white under her freckles that they made her look ghastly brown.

"I see that you know," said Raynor briefly. He stood looking down upon her yearningly, his heart rent asunder within him. . . . He was losing her, irrevocably. He knew it.

"Yes," said Roberta. Her voice told



him that she could hardly trust herself to say more lest tears get the better of her. They were welling up in her eyes now. Then, with a gathering storm of anger, "And Varuna Wardman has told me more, Mr. Raynor. I—I think we'd better go back to the yacht, George."

"Fie! Honey of my Heart!" rumbled Itam Nabi. The Black Prophet had been listening as he squatted blinking beside her. He understood none of the English, but he knew quite well what was going on and was scandalized, nay angry, that his white *Mem* should behave so—over nothing.

"Be silent, Itam Nabi!" gulped Roberta huffily. Then to Raynor, through her tears, "It's goo—good-bye, Mr. Raynor. I—we had best part—after this. . . ." She started to rise.

"Fie! Oh, fie!—*Rani* of mine!" growled Itam Nabi. "What mean you?—Look how the Presence is hewn in pieces before you! What blow is this that thou hast dealt him!"

Raynor had staggered back, his hand over his heart.

"Itam Nabi!—Silence!" cried Roberta, stopping him with a gesture. Then to Raynor, vindictively, "Are you Varuna Wardman's, Mr. Raynor? Or are you this native Queen's?" she asked him frigidly. "I assure you it's all one to me! I thought—once . . . but now. . . . Let's go, George. Oh, I can't *bear* it!"

A flood of tears had overwhelmed her. Raynor stood tongue-tied, unhappy, rocking as if under deadly blows. There is nothing bitterer or more unreasonable than jealousy. And he had no words to answer it. George whistled low and walked off; this was no place for him! They must settle it between them.

Itam Nabi continued to rumble, "Fie! Fie!—What madness is this, Dove of my Soul?" But Roberta did not still him;

she had collapsed into the cane chair and was suffering the tortures of a broken love, of shattered happiness, of disillusionment and jealousy that was voiced with but shuddering sobs.

RAYNOR knelt beside her. He insisted on taking the hand that she tried to wrench away. "Roberta!" His deep and abject tones pleaded with her. "Roberta! Please—there are circumstances—with the queen. . . . You will understand, some day. There is only one love in my heart—you! You! *You!*" He shook her fiercely in his intensity.

Roberta shrugged him off impatiently. "No!" she managed to gulp out. "Go away! I hate you! First one woman, then another—not for *me!*"

Raynor tightened his hold. "*Please, Roberta!*" he begged. "You misunderstand—completely. . . . Oh, how can I make you believe? I would give my life for you, gladly. There is no one but you. The rest is lies. . . . Roberta, darling . . . *please!*"

He attempted to take her in his arms in the fervor of his efforts to make her believe, understand. But Roberta fought him off angrily: "No! Once for all, Mr. Raynor, I tell you!" she lashed at him. "*You*, that have stooped to an intrigue with a native woman! That have begged Varuna Wardman, and I know not who else, to marry you. . . ."

Sobs choked her. Raynor felt keenly the anguish that she was suffering. He groped blindly for the talisman that would show her the difference between a single-hearted fidelity such as his love for her and a low intrigue such as she imagined his with the Queen. But he was no man of words. Even golden words were almost futile in a situation such as this. He tried it, brokenly, desperately.

"Roberta!" he pleaded. "There never was anything between Varuna Wardman and myself. Only folly; a brief infatuation on my part when I first met her, if you like. I hadn't seen a white girl in so long. . . . And I have been in love with you for years, carrying your image around in my heart——"

Roberta hunched an impatient shoulder. What nonsense was this? They had only met the week before for the first time!

"A vision of you, Roberta," went on Raynor tensely and trying once more to take her hand. "Memory, perhaps. I saw you once before, at the Gymkhana in Singapore. And I knew you then for the mate my heart was yearning for, the girl that was my ideal of a helpmeet and partner here—oh, do believe that all I say comes from the bottom of my heart! I love you and you only, Roberta!" he declared passionately. "Some day I'll tell you all that is between myself and Siti Ishtar—nothing that you imagine, I assure you!—but—don't let's discuss it now."

His voice was tender, persuasive, filled with anxiety lest she wreck the happiness of them both by this mood of jealous obstinacy. Roberta sat up and looked him in the eyes solemnly, her teeth catching on her lower lip. "She is going to have a child by you, Mr. Raynor," she told him sternly, "and that's quite enough for *me*. I don't want to hear any more about it. . . . It's good-b—Oh, take me away, George! I—can't—*bear*—it!"

She had burst into tears and collapsed in the chair, sobbing wretchedly, her face in her hands, her shoulders heaving. Raynor stood looking down at her a moment, his heart empty and hopeless. Itam Nabi rumbled on unceasingly, "Fie! Fie!—Gazelle of my heart!—What madness is this?—Allah! Allah! Have mercy!"

Raynor beckoned silently to George,

then strode into the Residency, to collapse, himself, in his room.

## 8

THEY were gone. Back to the Wardmans' yacht. Roberta was out of his life for ever. . . . Raynor came out of his stupefaction, his misery, to grasp desperately at the threads of his work here as the sole thing left in life. Where had he left Kota Sembilan when this catastrophe had come upon him? Oh, yes: Siti Ishtar and her father about to sail. . . . There would be a gory sea-fight this day. And no man could foretell the outcome with such redoubtable antagonists as the Orang Laut. Should he, or should he not, as British Resident, interfere at the last moment?

Raynor found himself answering that in the affirmative, now. Curious. . . . He, who had been all for letting them settle it themselves—so that Siti Ishtar's face be not blackened—now felt the strongest kind of urge to go down there in the Residency launch and do what he could to prevent this battle. And a moment's analysis showed his motive to be the new prince—the one human being that was still his to love. An amazingly tender feeling, this thought of that little life that was in part his! And Siti Ishtar was risking that life, as well as her own, in leading the van of Haroun Mahomet's battle. It *must* not be allowed.

Impulsively Raynor sprang to his feet, raised his voice in a shout of command for his Sikhs, and hastened down to the Residency wharf. And there he was astonished to find Ibn Ya'ïd seated in the stern sheets of the launch.

"Thou here, old friend!" he cried out. "I had thought that Haroun Mahomet would have given thee at least a division of his fleet to lead."

Ibn Yaïd looked up without replying. Wrapped in the folds of his burnoose, his attitude was that of patience personified. "*Ya Allah!* It is madness, this thing!" he said when he did speak. "Many will be slain. *Our* people, all of them! I did counsel that thou and I, as it were the British Raj and the Muntri of Kota Sembilan, go out in the launch and speak words of wisdom to the Rajah Redjal-ed-Dem before it is too late. And for that Siti Ishtar's face is cold upon me. I was not—invited."

Raynor took his hand cordially, yet guiltily, for he could not forget what lay between him and the Muntri. "Thou and I, old comrade!" he exclaimed impulsively. "We two are companions in misery this day!"

Ibn Yaïd raised his eyebrows but did not inquire what was troubling the Resident. The calamities of Kota Sembilan weighed too heavily upon his spirits. He had seen quite enough of war in his youth.

"We go down immediately," said Raynor. "While there is a stone yet unturned we two are for peace, eh, Muntri?"

Ibn Yaïd smiled. "*Aiwa!* War is for boys, not men! I knew that thy heart would say that, O *Tuan Besar!*"

"Shove off!" ordered Raynor.

The launch filled with armed Sikhs. She started her propeller with a boil of white water and then slid down the smooth and sunlit waters of the Djelan River, past that long line of barbaric proas which were now dropping from their yards huge and bellying green mat sails. They chugged by the Wardmans' yacht, and Raynor looked in vain for any sign of Roberta on deck; but there was no one, only Varuna, who waved at them as if they were off for some circus. Never would she appreciate the depths of feeling in human passions! The real sufferer lay below, Roberta, prostrated in her berth.

Raynor groaned as they left the yacht astern.

THEY crossed the bar. Down the coast came in sight the Orang Laut, a fleet of fifteen sail coming up under the strong southwest monsoon. Raynor measured his chances of getting anywhere near them without hostilities and decided that they were not very good. The red ensign of England fluttered astern of the launch. It meant something to most marauders, but not to Redjal-ed-Dem, who commanded this fleet. "The Man of Blood"—sinister name! He may have heard of England, in a vague way, but that flag meant to him principally the big white man who had urged upon Siti Ishtar the taking away of their cannon and was manifestly a fool.

"No further, *Tuan!*" warned Ibn Yaïd when they had come within cannon range. "The wise Sultan lets those who would make talk come to *him*. Also he lays his sword across his knees."

Those hints were not lost to Raynor. He stopped the launch. It lost way and floated idly on the dancing blue waters of the Gulf of Siam. The first law of Oriental diplomacy was to make the other fellow come to you; any unseemly scurrying down to meet that rebel flagship would at once make him, Raynor, the suppliant. And the second law was to have power to back up one's words—the sword across the knees in Ibn Yaïd's picturesque language. So he ordered both the howitzers loaded. And then this small bit of the world-power that is England lay waiting, for peace if possible, for war if it had to be.

Raynor turned to Ibn Yaïd. "And now, old comrade—since thou and I are not likely to come out alive from this—I'll tell thee all that lies between us. Know then: the white girl, she that thou knowest



is the ruby of my heart, she hath cast me from her."

"The *Rani* Severance hath done this?" cried Ibn Yaïd, astonished. "But no, *Tuan!* Look not thus on me as uncaring further to live! Women?—*Thu!* They blow this way and that; but it is all one if the heart loves! It is but to wait; as I have done these many years." Ibn Yaïd sighed and his thoughts were evidently with Siti Ishtar, that pirate whelp that he had loved since she was a child. It cut Raynor to the heart, that patient devotion—and hopeless.

"Nay, it can never be, old friend! The *Rani* Severance still loves, and even there is the bitterness of it. For there is a thing between us—that which among our people for ever parts even those who love with anguished hearts. . . . The Queen, Ibn Yaïd, is in child—by me."

"*Ha!*" shouted Ibn Yaïd and into his eyes shot a white-hot glare of ferocity while his right hand fumbled furiously for a weapon.

"Strike!" said Raynor. "I have wounded thee—and her—to the death. I do not wish to live. . . . Only——" He waved a hand toward the approaching pirate squadron. Their work was yet to do, whether they lived or died.

"The Queen *would* have it so," went on Raynor as Ibn Yaïd continued to stare at him speechless. "She begged of me a prince to rule the kingdom in her stead. Can a man refuse Siti Ishtar such a wish? Nay, I did plead for thee, Ibn Yaïd—but thou knowest Siti Ishtar!"

Ibn Yaïd was breathing hoarsely, in great shuddering gasps. His hand still grasped the dagger under the folds of his burnoose. His eyes were haunted by an expression of mixed pain and anger and perplexity. But his statesman's mind was at once taken with that idea of a prince for the kingdom who would have the wisdom and subtlety of the East combined with

the practical force and directness of the West. Had he not himself once considered even yielding Siti Ishtar to Shaitan Sadud, that a Sultan with a strong sword be born of them? With the statesman was now struggling the betrayed lover; more mortification and despondency over Siti Ishtar's ruthless indifference toward himself than anger at the man on whom she had pressed her favor—for Ibn Yaïd knew Raynor well enough never to believe that his had been the initiative in this.

"Let us die!" he said vehemently at length. "Enough! She has had of thee her wish. It has slain me, slain her whom thou lovest. Why tarry we longer? O Siti Ishtar! Ruthless! Heartless! Faithless——"

"Lo, the new Sultan—who knows?" Raynor interrupted the Muntri's wild outburst. "Thou and I, old friend, this thing have we to do. For her—and for him!" He was pointing down at Redjal-ed-Dem's flagship, now not half a mile off. His fleet was coming up behind him in a long slant, each pair of lateens cutting the wind just beyond the one ahead. It was a good formation, one that permitted any division to turn out of line and block any attempts to get inshore of them. Trained sea tacticians were the Orang Laut! It was any one's fight.

Ibn Yaïd composed himself. "*Aiwal!* What better way to die?" he said. "One last talk, for peace; then they will do what they will. We can not survive if they be deaf and fire upon us."

THE time for it was coming fast. Redjal-ed-Dem's proa bore a white bone in her teeth and her long forward guns had been shifted so that they bore directly upon the launch. Their muzzles stared at them menacingly, two round and gleaming brass eyes of death. Raynor stood up in the bows with Ibn Yaïd beside him and waved his topce.

"*Aback!*—Let go your sheets!" he yelled. "We are come for a great *bitcharra!*" [conference].

The proa held her way, coming nearer and nearer. A herculean figure, naked to the waist and wearing a huge golden turban, appeared in the foremast shrouds. That turban proclaimed him the pirate leader.

"Who hails the Sultan Redjal-ed-Dem?" he shouted. His voice was fierce and truculent, ringing like the brass blare of a trumpet.

"I, the British Raj!" called back Raynor. "Let go your sheets!"

Redjal-ed-Dem laughed arrogantly, then turned to give an order. The proas' sheets ran out and her huge mat sails hung slack. She lost way and came to rest not a hundred yards from the launch, her long guns and her side carronades bearing full upon them.

"'Tis done!" jeered Redjal-ed-Dem with a gleam of white teeth. "Thou fool! Thou who didst counsel the strumpet Queen to take away our cannon! Tell me this: Is there aught that can stay us now at Kwala Djelan? With thee, *Tuan Besar*, and thy soldiers under the hot breath of our guns?—O fool!"

"That is as it may be," said Raynor composedly. "You can shoot me down, now, Rajah, if you will. Try it! I tell you that the vengeance of steel ships, of such power as you never dreamed of, will hunt you from the seas if you do! Nay, listen to wise counsel," he went on, raising his voice above the cackling laughter of Redjal-ed-Dem. "Make your peace while you may. I swear that, not for many years, need you fear any disarmament. When all the seas are safe, perhaps; until then—*no!*"

He was talking to deaf ears. His very words were irksome to the Orang Laut. That there would *ever* be a time when they would not be free to roam the seas armed

and masters of their ships against any enemy suggested gunboat patrols of white intruders. Redjal-ed-Dem hooted his derision. And then came the one touch that would instantly kindle the spark of war, a hail from the proa's foremost-head:

"*Vela! Vela! Ya Sultan!* Many proas! Coming out from Kwala Djelan!"

Raynor glanced back hastily over his shoulder. A long line of lateen sails was moving fast over the low flats that hemmed the lagoon of the Djelan River—the fleet of Haroun Mahomet coming out. Its effect on the pirate chieftain was immediate and irrevocable.

"Ha! Treachery!" he shouted. "Verily you are a mighty liar!" he vociferated, using the coarse *kowe* [you] of insult. "Soft words!—And lo, a fleet that I knew not of! Nay—*Fire!*" he yelled, losing his temper.

A double bank of white smoke burst from the proa's bows. The sea boiled white with grapeshot around the launch. Raynor felt Ibn Yaïd staggering violently back against him. He had just time to stoop and grab the firing-latch of the howitzer when the Hand of Death touched him also on the shoulder and his consciousness left him. The enormous thunder of cannon-fire faded away dully in his ears. . . .

## 9

THE sea fight that is sung of in Kota Sembilan to this day went on without them. Ibn Yaïd was dead, Raynor severely wounded by grapeshot.

It was Roberta who was eye-witness to the battle. She roused out of her own stupor of misery at the first sound of heavy gunfire and came on deck. An Asian scene, familiar enough to her forefathers but perhaps never to be enacted again, spread before her eyes. The blue, dimpled waters dancing under the monsoon breeze, the palm-lined shores backed

by jungly hills—and, crowding the horizon line, that barbaric fleet of Siti Ishtar's proas jammed with fighting men and gleaming with cannon long since abandoned by the white race for more modern ordnance. They heeled over under their raking lateen sails, bearing down swiftly on the rebel fleet. Long bamboo oars with spoon-shaped blades moved in unison, aiding their speed.

Roberta bit her lip. The Resident? Where was he in this, to her, terrifying scene? She had heard gunfire, a sudden burst of it, then silence. She glanced over at Residency Island, but Raynor's launch was not at the wharf. It had been there and was crowded with Sikhs when she and George had gone over. Was he down there, trying to stop this civil war at the last moment, as their Resident and counsellor and elder brother?

Immediately anxiety claimed her. Her heart was telling her that she loved him still, in spite of all. And who was she to judge? This was Kota Sembilan, the East. Its code of morals, its entire philosophy of life, was entirely different from her own. Primitive, gaining its ends by means that were repugnant to the West. Yet Raynor knew and loved them, and it was not for her to set up the rigid white man's standard for him to conform to. There must be some justification for his relations with Siti Ishtar other than the distasteful intrigue that she imagined.

Varuna Wardman came hastily down the deck, a pair of binoculars in her hand. "Something terrible has happened, Miss Severance," she said. "We have been watching Mr. Raynor's launch and it was fired on. Look!"

She thrust the binoculars into Roberta's hands. Her attitude was no longer that of watching an Oriental circus for her benefit but of a frightened and uneasy rich girl.

Roberta trained the glasses. They

picked up, floating idly in the wake of that advancing rebel fleet, a white launch. Nothing moved on it. There were arms, heads, the bristle of rifle-barrels to be seen above its gunwales, but they seemed all dead. A horrified gasp came from her; then—*Boom! Boom!—Boom-a-room-boom-boom!* the long twelves of Siti Ishtar's fleet opened up and all the sea was covered with smoke and flame.

Varuna was speaking agitatedly. "We're clearing out! Father's talking to the captain about it now," she said. "You and your brother are welcome to stay on board, Miss Severance. I think you'd better!"

Roberta eyed her, aghast at the callousness in her tones. "You're not going!" she cried. "Without an attempt to do something for the Resident——"

"Don't be silly," Varuna broke in harshly. "He's dead, isn't he? And that leaves nothing but natives here, all fighting among themselves. It's no place for us, however it comes out. This pirate chief—Father told Mr. Raynor he ought to get a gunboat here, but he had some foolish notion of letting this Siti Ishtar person handle her own rebellion. I don't believe there's a Sikh of his guard left alive!" She waved a hand with disdain toward the distant launch.

Roberta faced her sternly. "Do go!" she said with scorn. "You can escape northward. You have all the sea, clear to China, in that direction. But we—we stay! We're residents, planters, here; and we stand by the Resident. Will you let us have the yacht's gig?"

"Nonsense! What for?" Varuna asked. Roberta's heart sank. This woman did not care two snaps for him! Raynor had told the truth in his pleading. A temporary infatuation on his part for this cold beauty, who collected admirers as some women do French dolls.

"To go down to the Resident, of course!" Roberta answered her fiercely.



"Wounded, or—dead. . . . They must not lie there at the mercy of any datu who feels like firing another carronade into them."

"What? In this battle?" Varuna cried out. "You must be crazy!"

The noise of it had become appalling. The spiteful crash of carronades had added their din to the drumming thunder of the big twelves. Single ships could be seen making for each other under sails and oars, their boarding parties massed on the forecastles. It was all a drift of white smoke, stabbed through with red flashes and glinting with sunlight on steel—krisses, javelins, muskets.

Roberta stamped her foot. "George!" she called forward. "Bring Itam Nabi!—You'll do us the favor of your gig, won't you, Miss Wardman?" she asked with cutting irony.

The yacht's anchor was coming up. Already her engine was turning over slowly. There were preparatory bells. George came running aft with Itam Nabi grunting behind them. His eyes met Roberta's with complete understanding.

"'Bout time!" he said wrathfully. "I've talked all *I'm* going to! All ashore, sis—if they'll let us."

Roberta ignored Varuna. This was no time to quibble about the loan of a boat! The three tumbled down the gangway in haste and shoved off in it with Varuna still looking at them doubtfully. How "close" they were, these rich people! she thought. Even permission to use their boat—now that the Resident was no longer of value to them. . . . She had not actually given it.

**G**EORGE and Itam Nabi took the oars and Roberta steered. South, direct for that thundering battle as fast as they could pull. An unintelligible hail came to them from the yacht. Then they saw her rounding on her rudder and heading

out north around Residency Island at full speed.

George sniffed. "Fine and handsome lot! Left Raynor flat! *I* couldn't budge Wardman—not when there was any danger to his own skin, damn him!"

Roberta said nothing. Good riddance! There was one ghost laid, anyway, Varuna Wardman. She was beginning to see that she had misjudged Raynor, had wounded him cruelly. Repugnant to her was still the thought of Siti Ishtar, but that was nativedom, none of her affair. She herself was his one love. . . .

"A little more east, Eyes-that-burn," Itam Nabi grunted. "Lo, a man could throw up his turban and catch it full of cannon-balls yonder!"

They were circling around the fight. It was at close quarters now, the carronades dubbing like the rapid beating of drums, swarms of warriors crowding over onto the rebel ships. The sea beyond was combed white with spent grapeshot and ricocheting twelve-pounders. The launch still floated—in an iron hail of raking missiles and a fog of drifting smoke. Into it Roberta steered. George and Itam Nabi put their backs to that last dash; then they had sheered alongside and Roberta had flung herself over the gunwale.

It was a ghastly scene of death and blood, Sikhs lying in the bottom where the raking fire had stricken them down, a few still surviving; an arm, a leg, moving feebly. Roberta climbed forward. Ibn Yaïd lay fallen across Raynor's legs, a red patch soiling his burnoose over the heart. The Resident huddled face downward, one arm still reaching up for the firing-latch of the howitzer above him.

Frantically Roberta tugged at him. She drew his head up into her lap and bound up in haste an arm bleeding and broken close up under the shoulder-joint. He was unconscious from loss of blood. George was busy at the water-keg and

Itam Nabi worked over the rest of the wounded. A cup was passed to Roberta. She held it to Raynor's lips and aided him to swallow.

"All right?" George asked. "Let's get out of this!" He turned on the motor immediately, for the sea sizzled around them with the plunge of lead slugs and the smashing spouts of spent cannonballs from where the battle still raged not a half-thousand yards away. The launch picked up speed as the exhaust sputtered. George bore off east in a wide turn, then headed her back for Residency Island.

And presently Raynor came to. His eyes opened, looked up at Roberta's face bending over him. He saw who it was. His one good arm rose up, then. It crooked around her neck and drew her down to him. . . . They said nothing; but Roberta's tears were falling and her arms around him were telling him—all.

LATER they sat together on the Residency veranda, watching Siti Ishtar's victorious fleet come back. Clash of cymbals, boom of drums, squealing of bamboo flutes, twang of stringed instruments. A triple *sorak* crashed out in men's exultant voices as the leading ship passed by. High on her poophouse that was tall as some Seventeenth Century vessel's, a radiant little figure in gold and flashing jewels was waving her kris at them—Siti Ishtar.

Raynor grinned. "The pirate whelp!" he chuckled at Roberta. "Dash it, I knew she could do it! Might as well have sat right here. . . . Let 'em settle these things in their own way does it! They'll have a big powwow over at the Queen's audience hall, next, and I suppose I'll be wanted. Think this beastly arm will let me, Roberta?"

She looked at him admiringly. Always the Resident, thinking of his people first and of himself nothing. Loyal she

seconded him in his duty here. His work was hers now, wasn't it?

"I think you'd better," she said. "May I go along and look after that arm?"

THEY were married, soon after, at the Residency. Iram Nabi got disgracefully drunk on that occasion. His adored *Mem* had seen the error of her ways, and the man for her was a true man, and it was the Power of God, he insisted! George, the first white planter in Kota Sembilan, gave the bride away. . . . And Raynor's work as guide and counsellor went on. Heavier, now, without Ibn Yaïd, the Faithful Servant; for where could a Vezier like him be found again? Siti Ishtar had the grace to weep for him, though her thoughts were now centered on her son.

That son came into the world in due time. The natives did not say much. They valued their heads. The boy certainly did not resemble Ibn Yaïd. . . . But he grew up to be sent to Oxford and Sandhurst and came back to take over the throne, on attaining his majority. And his first official act was to ask admission to the Malay Federated States for Kota Sembilan. He became the first native Governor of that principality—which is quite a different thing from the autocratic rule of a Sultan. Siti Ishtar's had been that; ruthless, strong, but wise. She knew what this people needed better than they did, that pirate's whelp! And for her, throughout the years, Sir James and Lady Raynor had but the warmest of affection. Roberta had forgiven her. Siti Ishtar was the East, and her ways were not to be judged by Roberta's standards. . . .

As for Raynor, there was one pilgrimage that he never failed to make, once a year, at the beginning of the fast of Rhamadan. It was to the tomb of the Faithful Servant, in the mosque of Kwala Djelan. Long and narrow and gable-

roofed like the Ark of the Covenant was that tomb. It was plated all over with beaten gold in relief characters in classic Arabic, texts from the Koran. Four huge candlesticks stood at the corners; around it draped flags, religious and war, drooping from their long poles. And, on the narrow end, where was the alms box for the poor that he loved, Siti Ishtar had caused to be engraved:

FAIZ IBN YAID

MUNTRI OF KOTA SEMBILAN

In the bosom of Allah, the Merciful,  
the Compassionate

It was a singularly fitting inscription. . . . Raynor communed there in spirit with the man he had wronged; but who was his old comrade, who with him had brought this people up from barbarism to an enlightened state with a progressive young ruler. Siti Ishtar, the pirate's whelp, was in the background now, content to look on and rule over the harem. It was the sacrifice of Ibn Yaïd that had made it all possible; and somehow, as man to man, Raynor felt that he, too, was forgiven.

# The Twisted Three

By S. B. H. HURST

*A story of Burma, two mysterious murders, and the theft of the sacred Tooth of Buddha—a tale of Bugs Sinnat of the Secret Service*

**I**T CAME floating down the Rangoon River.

Through the centuries strange things, many of them, and wonderful things have floated past Rangoon and the old Burmese village that stood there before the British made their capital there, but never such a ghastly jest as this. A murdered white man who had been stabbed through the heart, sitting bolt upright in a chair fastened in one of the small boats called *sanpans*. In the dead man's mouth a big cigar at an angle; on his head a black "top" hat, and in his hands a large brass crucifix! Floating down the river, and seen by the police and horrified spectators on the steamers as the morning mists were lifting from the

water and the *paddy* fields, and the sun was rising in a swift flame. . . .

Two hours later Horace Sinnat, of the secret service, known to his intimates as "Bugs," sat in the office of his friend Williams, the superintendent of police. Immediately upon the discovery of the dead man in the *sanpan* Williams had talked to Bugs on the long distance phone, and Bugs had come from the ancient city of Pegu in a fast plane. . . .

"I knew the case would interest you," Williams was saying. "It's so damned weird!"

"Any clues at all, Yank?" asked Bugs.

"You would think there ought to be a million," answered Williams, "what with all that theatrical set-up, but there is only





*"Tied to a chair and wearing a top hat, the corpse came floating down the Rangoon River."*

one that is definite. That is the *sanpan*. The license number of the *sanpan*, X.X.0034, which tells us that the *sanpan* was owned by one Sin-byu. My men are looking for him. His address was, of course, his *sanpan*. He lived on it, and slept on it; cooked his rice and ate his *napi* in its tiny cabin, as all these *sanpan* wallers do. I have sent out a net of men to get this Sin-byu, and find out all about him and his associates. The top hat tells us nothing, except that it was made in London; the crucifix is one of thousands

that you can pick up all over the country—issuing from Catholic missionaries. . . . Doctor Sims says the man was killed with one thrust of a very thin blade, sort of stiletto, from in front. His identity is unknown to us."

"Whoever did it," said Bugs thoughtfully, "must be very sure of himself—must feel safe, not afraid of being found out. Otherwise he would not have gone to all the time and trouble, and taken the risk of that weird set-up in the boat. The *why* of that weird set-up probably

holds the secret—if we could figure out *why* the corpse was sent down the river dressed up like that we might begin to get somewhere. Body was quite naked, eh?"

"Except for the top hat," answered Williams. "He was wired to the chair—native, bamboo chair! . . . Ah—here comes the sergeant!"

A sergeant of white police came into the office.

"Find Sin-byu?" asked Williams quickly.

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant gravely. "Found his dead body!"

"Where?"

"Found it under the piles of an old wharf, well up-river, sir! Other *sanpan wallers* identified it. One of the Sikh police found it. And Sin-byu was killed the same way as the white man in the boat. Stabbed through the heart."

"Dead long?" asked Bugs.

"Several hours, sir," answered the sergeant. "The assistant surgeon says the man was killed, probably, about midnight."

"Same time as the white man," said Bugs. "Murderer killed both of them about the same time. His killing of Sin-byu was because he wanted the boat—a commonplace killing that will not tell us much. . . . All right, Yank, I'll take the case—but let your men do all they can. This looks more than queer—it's involved!"

IT DID not take Bugs long to change his identity. In less than an hour he became to all who saw him one of those powerfully built Burmese who catch their own fish, prepare and peddle it. Bugs was hawking *napi* (which is a dried fish of the utmost pungency) through narrow streets. He was dressed in a stained *sarong*, and his voice echoed disturbingly wherever he went. Such a Burmese can

go anywhere without question, and the well-known toughness of the *napi* men is a protection.

As he yelled fish he did a lot of thinking—about the *why* of the ghastly travesty of the sacredness of death. Surely, only a maniac could so act upon a dead man! That crucifix—did that indicate a religious maniac of another creed, a creed that hated Christianity? The cigar, cunningly fastened in the dead man's mouth! The old London "topper." Truly the strangest thing that had ever come to this secret service man of strange adventures was this murder. . . .

Thinking, he had progressed through the narrow streets of old wooden native dwellings—huts, shacks, and here and there an old and unpainted two-story building. He pushed through the crowds, and shouted his tale of fish. And now he had reached the wharf where the body had been found—the body of Sin-byu. There was no curious crowd—death is a small matter in Burma, and a *sanpan waller* who has no family arouses small grief. Besides, it was very hot and the old wharf lacked shade. But a big, bearded Sikh policeman stalked about, his spotless turban glistening in the sunlight. . . .

"*Napi! Napi!*"

Bugs walked on the wharf. The policeman, whom Bugs knew well, sniffed in disgust—for only a Burmese can eat *napi*—but Bugs approached him as if expecting to make a sale.

"*Napi! Napi!*"

The policeman turned on his heel and walked away, but Bugs followed him, crying his wares. Then did the Sikh turn and say things which in the Punjaub are considered most impolite.

"But, Ruttan Singh!" exclaimed Bugs in the same dialect.

The mouth of the policeman opened. Then he grinned and saluted.

"Don't salute me!" said Bugs. "When did Ruttan Singh go *puggly*?"

"*Sahib! Sahib!* You will yet be the death of me. Only by your voice and the manner in which you speak did I know you! So surprised was I, although I ought to know, that I for a moment did become *puggly*—forgot myself—and saluted. . . . What is the order, *sahib*? Please do not command me to buy any of that damnable fish!"

"You will arrest me, Ruttan Singh!" said Bugs.

"*Sahib?*"

"Yes, arrest me—it does not matter for what. Then we will have a scuffle, and you will fall and dirty your uniform on this filthy wharf, and I will escape from you. You may pretend to pursue, but you will go the wrong way!"

"*Atcha, sahib!*"

"I am going to be very rude," said Bugs.

Bugs became very rude. His voice shrilled and rumbled by turn, as he said thiogs in the toneful Burmese tongue which no policeman—if he understood—would stand for. Then, when the Sikh grabbed him, they wrestled.

"Not too much," whispered Bugs. "It's *bot garram!*"

"Hot as Jehanum," grinned the Sikh.

"Now, run, *sahib!*"

Bugs ducked and began to run, as the jubilant crowd gathered from everywhere—every sort of native of India, China, and Burma, with a few tatterdemalion whites. The big Sikh had slipped to his knees. The crowd enjoyed this. Bugs ran through a lane the crowd made for him, and it closed like a wave that has been broken as he got through—making a wall through which the Sikh had to push his way. No man molested the policeman, but by the time he got past the crowd Bugs was nowhere in sight. He was well hidden in a Burmese drinking-shop, where

the one-eyed proprietor welcomed him as one who hated Sikhs and all police, and truly had a reason to, as Bugs knew. For that one-eyed man, huge and fat, was not merely a dispenser of bad liquor. He had served several short terms in jail. He was a receiver of stolen goods, but the government had never succeeded in convicting him for anything more than disorderly conduct—which meant anything.

"Hide me!" Bugs panted as he rushed into the den.

"What have you done, *napi?*" asked the huge Burmese, peering at Bugs through his one, sinister eye.

"I tried to kill that Sikh, but failed. Yet will they give me six months, eh?"

"More than that for attempted murder, if they can prove it! Come this way."

**T**HE big man led the way hurriedly. For so large a man he was very fast on his feet, for he had one time followed the decent occupation of a professional wrestler.

"With my fish-knife I tried to cut out his stomach!" panted Bugs as he followed. "But he managed to grip my wrist, and the knife did fall on the wharf. Then I had to trip him and run, for he was about to blow his whistle and summon a regiment of Sikhs. He picked up my knife!"

Which was true. And Ruttan Singh was now telling another Sikh of this attempt to stab him, and artistically leading the other Sikh in the opposite direction from where Bugs had gone. . . .

"Why did you try to kill him?" asked the big man as he opened a door in the floor, and led Bugs down some steps.

"Nothing much," said Bugs gruffly. "It is my business—I mean, I feel that way sometimes. Feel that I must kill a man or go mad. And that big Sikh looked so nice and white that I wanted to see how the blood of him would look running down his white uniform. I get that way



—must kill. Just as one feels he must love!"

"You were seen by many?"

"No," said Bugs. "No witness to the knife, except that it is there in the hand of the Sikh. He was fast and knocked it out of my hand before any man—hearing our voices—came to look!"

"You need practise," sneered the big man. "This way!"

He had opened another door, a door no one not knowing it was there could have found in that dark cellar. And now he led the way down a tunnel in the earth—a tunnel of creeping things, centipedes, and worse.

"Why did you come, so trusting, to me for help?" growled the big man.

"This place was the first place I saw as I ran. I don't like it much!"

And Bugs allowed his voice to tremble somewhat, and he slowed up and hung back as if afraid to follow the big man much farther.

"You fellows are all alike," sneered the big man. "You run amuck now and then, and then, when the passion to kill leaves you, you are a lot of cowards, afraid of the dark! Come on! I have harbored you, and if you go back the police will know it—and you are not worth getting into trouble for! I am now sorry I helped you—coward! But you will pay me—in obedience! Or you will be sorry!"

"Where do you take me?"

And now the voice of Bugs was the voice of a badly scared man, reacting in terror, as all men who run amuck in the East do, from the blind passion to kill after it subsides.

"To where you may hide," the sinister voice answered. "Where you can hide until the Sikh forgets—or I need your services!"

"I obey," stammered Bugs.

He knew thoroughly that unpleasant neighborhood near the old wharf, but a

careful search through police records had revealed only one place in which lived any one who had served a term. Others arrested in that neighborhood and sent to jail had been transients. But the big man had lived there for years, taking his incarcerations as a matter of course—apparently—and always with a clever lawyer to plead for him. A *babu* lawyer, a native of the Deccan. This entire adventure might, probably would, lead to no solution of the mystery of the man in the top hat, but it was the only way of approach Bugs could think of. . . .

THE big man led Bugs into a stuffy cave—dug into the earth many years before, by its looks. He had lighted a small lantern. There was some ventilation, but Bugs could not see where it came from.

"You will wait here—food will be brought to you—until I need you!" said the big man.

"I do not like waiting in the dark," exclaimed Bugs.

The big man laughed.

"So I will not wait! Besides, I have business needing my attention," went on Bugs.

"You will do——" the big man began but stopped suddenly.

"Sit down—on the floor!" snapped Bugs.

So quickly had he pulled his revolver from under his *sarong* that the one-eyed man had not seen the motion.

"Sit down," said Bugs. "I want to talk to you."

The big man obeyed. He was watching Bugs like a leopard waiting a chance to spring.

"Better not try it," drawled Bugs. "I practise with this gun by shooting the heads off snakes—and your head is bigger!"

The big man glared balefully.

"I wanted the conversation to be private," went on Bugs, "or I would have talked to you upstairs. I had nothing to arrest you for—so I let you 'hide' me."

"You a Burmese policeman?" asked the big man.

"Probably," said Bugs. "But one who does not accept bribes!"

He was thinking, "Third degree stuff is hardly ethical, but needs must when the devil drives!" Aloud he continued, "You will be so very polite as to tell me what you know about the killing of an unknown white man, who he was, and, also, something concerning a dead *sanpan waller* in whose boat the dead white man drifted down the river. Don't pretend you don't know, because all Rangoon knows this thing has happened!"

"I know nothing!" snarled the big man.

"So!" drawled Bugs. "Then I will allow you to stay here until you remember! Food *may* be sent to you! I myself will visit you at times. Unless you lied, or bragged, you can never get out of here. When you unlocked both those doors I noticed what fine American locks they had—and that they were made of iron, covered cunningly with teak! And you said that there was only one key for each door! And that you had the keys with you always! You bragged overmuch. . . . I will take those keys. . . . You were alone upstairs when I came in—no one will know where you are. It's dark and lonely down here—you had better remember about the murders, and tell me so that I can take you to prison, where you will be more comfortable!"

The big man laughed sarcastically.

"What you threaten to do is not legal," he said.

"Of course not," agreed Bugs, smiling. "That's why I do it! No doubt you would like me to summon your clever *babu* lawyer."

The big man shrugged, but Bugs saw that he was tensed for a spring. Suddenly the big man laughed again. He tried an old trick.

"Your gun is not loaded!" he said.

Bugs laughed, but he did not take his eye off the big man or look at his gun. Instead he kept it pointed at the big man's head.

"I wonder how many other ignorant but rough men you have brought down here—and used later!" he said quietly. "For of course after you showed a man this hide-out of yours you would never give him a chance to tell any one else about it! Try and sleep, for I am going to leave you."

He backed toward the door, went through it and ostentatiously locked it. He went along the passage and made a lot of noise locking the other door. Then he very quietly came back. The locks, well oiled, made slight noise as he returned. Very quickly he opened the door to the cave again—just in time to see the big man slip through a cleverly concealed panel which looked like nothing but the earth of the cave wall. Bugs followed—down another tunnel. The big man ran and stumbled along another narrow passage.

Bugs did not fire. He did not wish to hurt, or arrest, the big man. And he made no effort to catch him. He saw the big man disappear in the sunlight that streamed into the tunnel when he flung open a door that opened just above the river. And he heard the big man plunge into the stream, and swim away frantically among the piles of the old wharf. Then Bugs turned back.

HE WENT back to the drink shop, gun still in his hand, and now it held several men, all shouting for the proprietor, wanting drinks. They stared at Bugs, but he took no notice of them.

In the street he saw Ruttan Singh and another Sikh. He beckoned to them.

"Here are keys, Ruttan Singh. Explore the place below. Then station two men down there day and night. Arrest any man who comes. But, first, close tightly the door you will find that opens onto the river."

Ruttan Singh saluted now without comment from Bugs.

Half an hour later, Bugs, still a Burmese in appearance, was driving a big, powerful but apparently decrepit car along the ancient road that leads to the old capital of Burma, Pegu, forty odd miles from Rangoon. From Williams he had learned that so far the murdered white man had not been identified.

"The one-eyed man did not kill him," mused Bugs, as he dodged a sacred Hindoo cow on the high road. "If this goes on there will be more Hindoos than Burmese in this country! . . . No, and neither did he kill the *sanpan waller*. But he may know who did it. I will have him watched—it's the only line I have as yet. That elaborate tunnel of his is fairly harmless, although he may have put a dozen of his hirelings out of the way. A good deal of illicit merchandise—that's what the cave and tunnel are for. But my little men will find out something!"

He had entered the old city that sits under the shade of the great Schwe-madaw pagoda, and he had driven his car to the very poorest quarter, just south of the abandoned Buddhist burial-ground. There, in a mean street of huts, he stopped the car. He got out and entered the shack nearest the cemetery. He suddenly stood still.

"Ah!" he said aloud. "Now I know why the one-eyed man took me down below. It did not seem reasonable that he should admit a stranger who was running from the police into his hiding-place! That puzzled me! At any other

time the one-eyed man would have told me to go to hell and do my own hiding. He wants a man he can use, a man wanted by the police! That *babu* lawyer will be interesting!"

He entered the shack. Eleven little men of the jungle rose as one from their mats and ran to greet him joyfully. Again Bugs paused, and they waited respectfully, none speaking.

"That voyage down the river. The murdered man may have been dead six hours, as the doctor says, but he only began his voyage half an hour or so before sunrise—otherwise he would have been farther down the river—where he was meant to be. Somebody blundered!" Aloud he spoke to the eleven little men. "Greetings, my children, I have a task for you."

"*Sahib! Sahib!* We thrill toward the hunting!" said the leader of the little men of the jungle—who was known as the Snake Man, because he loved and worshipped the reptiles.

"As always!" exclaimed Bugs affectionately.

For these little, illiterate men had worked for him for years, and many of his most spectacular successes had been due to their working. They could go anywhere and remember all they saw; and they would die for Bugs cheerfully. One of them, the Dog Man, had given his life for the secret service man some years before. . . .

"We take a ride together," said Bugs, "and while we ride to Rangoon I will tell you of your quest. Pile into this big car I have outside."

THEY piled in like eleven children, chattering happily about the joy of the ride they were about to take. Bugs started the car. He drove toward an opening in the ancient city wall—which is forty feet thick—through this and into



the glaring open country. Then he spoke to the little men and their chatter ceased. He told them about the murders, of the old wharf where the *sanpan waller's* body had been found, and he accurately described the big man with one eye. . . .

"You will find him and watch him and watch all with whom he talks," he said. "And the Snake Man will take your reports concerning this watching, and he will report to me at the place appointed—at the time of the evening meal daily. But if anything that seems to be more important than the watching takes place, then will he come to me at once!"

So they reached Rangoon. The little men scattered to their task. Bugs ran the car into the police garage, and went to see Williams again.

"Ah," said Williams; "you got back just in time—the dead white man has been identified."

"Good," said Bugs. "Who and what is he?"

"He has been in and out of Rangoon for some months," said the police superintendent. "Lives, when in the city, at that small, cheap hotel called The Oxford—you know the place. He registered as James Briggs, from New York, U. S. A. Nobody knows his business. He said he was just a tourist. No letters or other means of identification found in his trunk—I went through it myself. Seems to me that he was just one of those wandering white men who live on their wits. If he was a *pukka* tourist he would never have lived in that hotel—as you know. His entire lack of identification other than the name he gave the hotel people seems to indicate a lack of entire respectability—but I may be wrong there. However, I have not cabled New York—not yet!"

Bugs nodded.

"Yank," he said, for Williams was American born, "I believe that you will

find the clothing of Briggs somewhere in the river not far downstream from the wharf where the body of the *sanpan waller* was found. Drag for it, will you? The stiletto may be with the clothes! Of course the stuff may have drifted, but I don't think so—it has not had time. You see, I am convinced that the body of the *sanpan waller* and the clothes of Briggs were weighted and sunk near the wharf—all fastened together, clothes and *sanpan waller*. Somebody blundered, working hastily, and the body of the *sanpan waller* got away from the bundle of clothes and the stones, or what not, supposed to hold it down. The murderer was not such a fool as to trust the river—he tried to help it! But that wharf is just at the part of the Upper Bend where a swirl of water comes down—just below that branch of the Irrawaddy which meets the Rangoon river. And the river, instead of hiding the body of the *sanpan waller* for ever, washed it clear of the weights and among the piles of the wharf!"

The telephone on Williams' desk shrilled. He took the receiver off the hook.

"Yes! Who? The governor's secretary! . . . Very well, connect us, please!"

He turned to Bugs. "It's the governor! What can have happened? Must be merry hell when Lord Cameron phones me like this!"

Bugs stared, as puzzled at this unexpected call as was Williams.

"Yes, my lord!" Williams was speaking into the phone again. "What? Good grief! . . . What, sir? . . . Find Bugs! He is here! . . . Yes, my lord!"

Williams handed the receiver to Bugs. "This is certainly the limit," he said as he did so.

"Bugs?" said the governor.

"*Pickhead*," answered Bugs, giving the code word arranged between them—

which was the nickname given by the secret service man to Cameron when they went to school together, when Cameron invented the nickname *Bugs* for his friend.

"The tooth of Buddha has been stolen!" said the governor, so gravely that he seemed to groan.

"My God!" exclaimed Bugs. "But it does not seem possible!"

The tooth of Buddha, worth infinitely more than all the rubies Burma ever produced! *The tooth of Buddha—stolen!* As Bugs said, it did not seem possible. . . .

"Great Scot, Pickhead! But it seems as impossible—as impossible as stealing a lone cub from a tigress!"

"I want you to drop the case you are now working on, and go on this tooth mystery!" the governor of Burma was saying. "For heaven's sake go to the Inner Monastery, and talk to the Abbot—he is about out of his mind!"

"The mind of the Abbot is a mere detail," replied Bugs, very gravely. "I need hardly mention what this will mean, old man—with the mind of the people bent upon revolution, and seeking an excuse!"

"Please go to the monastery, Bugs," said the governor. "What's a murder more or less when compared to this thing?"

"I'll be there in thirty minutes—soon as I can shave and dress," said Bugs. "Hands off as far as the police are concerned, eh?"

"Of course," replied the governor. "Sikhs and Christians would not be admitted to a Buddhist Holy of Holies—you go as the representative of the government of India—and you have your own clever way of getting anywhere you want to go! Keep me posted, old man!"

And the governor hung up.

"It can't be a bluff on the part of the Buddhists—something to stir up relig-

ious emotion in the country and so weld the people into one real hot rage against the British government?" asked Williams.

"Not with that Abbot: he's as honest as the Bishop of London!" answered Bugs. "I must burry and look into it. . . . In the meanwhile, carry on, will you?—about the dragging for the clothing of Briggs. My little men will advise me of any other happenings!"

**B**UGS, now well dressed and a white man again, drove in a big car with a liveried driver, to the central Buddhist monastery of Rangoon, through streets which are a mixture of East and West in the styles of their buildings—a mixing of the very old and the new. A large office building, steel and concrete, stared across at the blackened teak monastery which had been built when the ancestors of the men who built the office building were painted savages. Into the courtyard Bugs had the driver take him, past the curious little school where a monk was teaching Burmese children, as the monks have done freely for two thousand years.

As the personal representative of the governor of Burma Bugs was admitted to the old Abbot.

A lined and wrinkled brown face that had much of the benign expression of the Buddha, hands that trembled and a body that rested frailly in its "throne"—and a voice that pleaded with Bugs, as if the representative of the government could do anything he wished to do.

"This disgrace to me, after two thousand years! That most precious thing in all the world—a tooth of the Blessed One. And stolen away. Oh, man, please find it for me. But not to punish the thief, but to restore that lost glory to this, my monastery!"

Bugs bowed gravely to the pathetic old man.

"Will your graciousness please give or-

ders that I may be taken to the violated shrine?" he said.

"You will find *it*!" the old man exclaimed.

"The governor has ordered that everything in the power of the government shall be used in the search," answered Bugs.

The old man sighed gratefully. He turned to one of the monks about his throne—a big man, a man from the hills of the Shan States, as Bugs deduced.

"Conduct this excellent man to the violated shrine," said the Abbot. "See that all honor is done to him, and that every opportunity for investigation is afforded."

The big Shan bowed and courteously indicated the way to Bugs.

How old that winding passage smelled! Black with age, and with an eery rustling which, while it was but the eternal draft blowing through the ancient place, seemed to be the whispers of two thousand years of dead and forgotten monks.

Then the shrine. The sanctuary. A room of heavy wood, always freshly gilded. The mighty teak table on which the tooth, in its gold case, had rested. A gold case no longer there. An empty table. Five devotees kneeling there. Not monks, but Buddhists from outside the monastery.

The big Shan pointed eloquently to the empty table. The devotees, heads bowed to the floor, squinted up curiously.

"There was a guard?" asked Bugs.

"There was, and is always a guard," replied the Shan. "See!"

He showed Bugs a recess, across the face of which was a wooden grille. Going close to this—the light was very dim—Bugs saw the face of a monk peering through the grille. The guard of the shrine. . . .

"What light was here?" asked Bugs.

"Just the sacred lamp," said the Shan.

He pointed to a very small gold lamp suspended from the low ceiling. It was burning—it was always burning.

"The light is of course always dim in here?" said Bugs.

"The place is far too sacred for glare or noise!" answered the Shan reproachfully.

"Exactly!" agreed Bugs. "And now show me how the thief got in."

UNTIL this moment Bugs had imagined that the theft was an inside job—although the horrible sacrilege of such an act, since an inside thief would be a monk, had seemed to bar that opinion. The tooth had been stolen after the shrine was closed to all but the monks—after sunset the previous evening. But when the big Shan bowed and began to lead Bugs along another passage—to where the burglar had entered—the idea of an inside job seemed even more far-fetched.

Entry had been effected, apparently, by a very remarkable workman. On the outer wall of the monastery compound there was no sign. A rope or something like that must have been used to scale the compound wall. This indicated two or more men. Then a hole had been cut with a fine saw in that part of the monastery nearest the shrine—in the wall of the passage. The solid teak must have made the cutting a long task. A rough hole through which a man of average size could crawl. Bugs examined it very carefully. His own wide shoulders were too big for the hole. He stood in the passage in deep thought, while the Shan, respectfully silent, stood by his side. Through the hole came the noises of Rangoon—a symphony of strangeness. And also, vague and alluring, the smell of the early cooking-fires for the evening meal. . . .

"I wish to see him who was on guard



last night!" said Bugs, turning away from the hole in the old wall.

The Shan bowed again.

"We have our methods of correction," he said. "But for the benign influence of the Lord Buddha the punishment for such a person as this monk, who slept when on guard duty, would be death! But so far, beyond solitary confinement, the Abbot has not decided what punishment, other than death which is not permitted, this sin merits. . . . This way, please."

The place had been dug out of the ground—ages ago. This dungeon of the monastery, dark, foul, damp. It was so small that it reminded Bugs of the "Little Ease" in the Tower of London. It was most like a grave—without the peace of death to its unhappy occupant!

"He waits there," said the Shan, "for what pain befalls, and for what his next incarnation 'rewards' him with. It is likely that he will be a crawling worm when he is born again!"

The unfortunate monk—a young man—fairly grovelled in the pit.

"Please stand up," said Bugs quietly. And, as the poor fellow obeyed, Bugs turned to the Shan and said, "Will you kindly get me some sort of a light? It is needful that I examine this man carefully."

The Shan bowed and went to get a lamp. Bugs seized the prisoner by the shoulder.

"I won't hurt you," he whispered gently.

The Shan was out of sight. Bugs released the shivering monk.

"Tell me quickly—how much opium do you use every day?" said Bugs.

"None, your honor," whimpered the young monk.

"I thought so," muttered Bugs, in English, which the monk did not understand. Then, in Burmese, "Yet, you slept last

night, and while you slept thieves came and stole the tooth of the Blessed One. . . . Why did you sleep when on guard of the most precious thing in Burma?"

"I . . . I don't know . . . I can not understand why, my lord," whimpered the monk, upon whom the greatest tragedy in Burmese Buddhist history was blamed.

"I thought so," Bugs again muttered in English.

"My lord!" trembled the monk.

"Never mind," said Bugs gently. "Keep a stout heart, and do not allow your conscience to trouble you overmuch. Remember that the mother and the father of Conscience is *Fear*. . . . I hear the Shan returning!"

The big monk was bringing the lamp Bugs had requested. Bugs took it with thanks. And then he stood and surveyed the prisoner.

"Enough!" he said sternly.

He returned the lamp to the Shan.

"Let us leave this shivering wretch who forgot his duty," he said. "He can not help us, for he slept—he did sleep when he should have watched! . . . Let us, for a moment, return to the shrine—after that I must leave you and report to the governor."

The always courteous Shan bowed again. He seemed amused and puzzled by the actions of the secret service man—as if he were courteously endeavoring to admire all that Bugs did. . . .

**B**ACK at the shrine, Bugs again examined the grille of the guard-box. He walked to the door and listened to what noise came in from the city through the unhealed opening in the wall of the passage. The devotees were rising from their prayers and preparing to leave the monastery. Bugs watched them casually. Suddenly he tensed, but the attendant Shan saw no sign of this tensing.

"I thank you very much," Bugs was

saying. "And now I must leave you and make my report. I will not again intrude my presence upon the good Lord Abbot."

He followed the devotees to the courtyard, toward the gate. He beckoned the driver of his car, and bowed farewell to the Shan monk. Then he walked rather swiftly to the gate. . . .

Across the road the ever faithful Snake Man was standing idly. He always knew where Bugs was to be found. Evidently he had some news for the secret service man. But Bugs had something more important than any news. He made certain signs to the little Snake Man—much as a catcher makes his signals to the pitcher—and the Snake Man scratched his left ear, and—followed one of the devotees who had just left the shrine. It was the Snake Man's job never to allow the devotee out of his sight—so had Bugs signalled. An old and wasted man, this devotee. Thin, with a strange face. Not a Burmese, but a native of the Peninsular, of India proper. It was his face that had brought the tension to Bugs. A very interesting face—if found in a Buddhist monastery. For Bugs had seen—very faint it was, as faint as the man's religious feelings would allow—Bugs had seen between the eyes, just above the nose of this old man's face—a *Hindoo caste mark*! . . . In a Buddhist monastery!

Some knowledge of India's religious prejudices maybe necessary to understand fully the significance of this discovery—only possible to a keen observer with extraordinarily keen sight. The monks, suspecting nothing, had not noticed it. A Hindoo worshipping in a Buddhist shrine! . . . What did this mean? . . . It was one of the strangest—in many ways *the* strangest thing Bugs had ever seen during his long service. . . .

He got into his car. . . .

"The government building," he told the driver. The car left the monastery,

into the quick twilight of a Burmese evening. The flying foxes now and then crossed a low moon. Of a sudden it was velvet dark, and much cooler—and all the scents of all the flowers and trees rose in gratitude to the coolness, while the stars came through the velvet of the sky like careless diamonds.

"Pickhead will be waiting for me," mused Bugs. "But, by the Lord, that caste mark on that old chap's forehead must mean something—something damned important. But the Snake Man will find out who he is and all it's possible for him to find out. I must at once get in touch with that anomalous old man. . . . I wonder how the weird murder case is working out! . . . Here we are!"

HE GOT out of the car and ran up the steps leading to Lord Cameron's private office. The secretary, who was just leaving for the night, said that the governor was waiting. Bugs went in.

"Any luck, Bugs?" asked the worried governor when they were alone.

"Lots!" said Bugs laconically.

"Ah!" exclaimed the governor. "Thank God for that! You know, of course, that fanatical Buddhists are saying, all over Burma, that Christian missionaries stole the tooth—as an insult to Buddhism!"

Bugs' face was grim.

"We are bound to have trouble in Burma—some time," he said gravely. "And it won't be any passive resistance, like Gandhi, either. . . . But it won't come—won't be brought to a head by the tooth of Buddha! I am still far from knowing who got the tooth—if, indeed, it has left the monastery. . . . No, no, the old Abbot knows nothing about it. . . . You know, Pickhead, I don't like to talk about a case, even to you, until the solution is in my hands—but this I will tell you. In the first place, the hole in the monastery

wall was sawed from the inside! And, in the second, I found a well-marked Hindoo praying in the Buddhist shrine!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the governor.

"That's all I know—as yet!—but it's a lot, as I said," went on Bugs. "And now, old man, I must go. For the next twenty-four hours or so look like busy ones for me. So long!"

He shook hands with the governor and returned to the office of Williams, the superintendent of police.

In Williams' office he found Williams, his assistant and a white police sergeant eagerly examining some wet clothing.

"You were right, as usual," beamed Williams. "Bugs, you're a wizard. See!"

He exhibited a shirt, coat and pants, on which there were blood stains the water of the river had not obliterated.

"Fastened to a large shackle," went on Williams, "with native coir rope. But see! The rope is broken on one of its loops—a loop just about the size of the circumference of Sin-byu's, the *sanpan* man's body!"

Bugs looked at the grisly things. The shackle was from the anchor cable of some big ship.

"Anything in the pockets?" he asked.

"Not a blasted thing," exclaimed Williams.

"Then this find won't help much," said Bugs. "It was obvious, when the *sanpan* waller's body was found, that these clothes would not be far away. No sign of the stiletto, of course?"

"No sign," said Williams.

"Well, I must go now—so long!" said Bugs. "That other case, you know, Yank!"

The American nodded, and Bugs left the police headquarters. He walked slowly to his room. He was very tired, and his brain felt worn out and useless. He had his servant bring him a whisky and soda and a sandwich. Then he lay

back in a long cane chair with a pungent Burmese cheroot in his mouth and dismissed his servant for the night. The servant was faithful and trustworthy, but Bugs was expecting the Snake Man—a *jungly waller* who instinctively distrusted servants!—and he wanted to be alone when the Snake Man arrived with his report.

But he had to wait some time. So long, in fact, that he felt slightly worried lest the little man of the jungle had been hurt in the traffic of the city. But finally he heard the thin, high-pitched, hissing whistle the Snake Man used when playing with his snakes—which was a signal between them. He opened the door.

THE Snake Man came in slowly, hanging his head, cringing like a dog that feels it has done wrong.

"What's the matter?" asked Bugs quickly.

The Snake Man sighed deeply.

"*Sabib!* Oh, my father and my mother, I have failed thee! I am no longer worthy to be thy man!"

Bugs smiled.

"You have never failed me before," he said gently, "and failure can be remedied. Tell me about it."

The little man squatted on the floor, looking up at Bugs like some strangely intelligent monkey, and spoke.

"I did follow the man you told me to, *sabib*. He went into a shop that sells spice. I waited, but he did not come out. I would have gone in the shop with him but that I did not want him to think I followed. I waited; then, fearing, I, too, went in and asked the price of turmeric. It was so and so. I spoke of the old gentleman—there was nothing else I could do—to the shopkeeper, who, to my surprise, was a Burmese. He pointed to the back door, and told me the old man had bought a pound of *dhal* and gone out



that way! I followed like a thirsty dog, but I saw nothing of him. . . . Will my father and my mother forgive me? For lo, I have wandered all about this blasted city, even up the hill to the great pagoda have I been, where the red-eyed beggars insulted me until I hit two of them—but never a sign of the old man whom my father bade me follow from the old monastery gate!"

"There is nothing to forgive—you did your best!" said Bugs. "And what you have just told me has helped me. I feel in me something growing, like a seed in good ground—something which will grow into what we want to know concerning certain matters. Tell me the location of the shop, then go and eat and sleep, and see me tomorrow."

The Snake Man told Bugs the place of the spice shop and went out. He turned at the door again, and spoke sorrowfully.

"Behold we have all failed thee, which we have never done before. For none of the others, or I, have seen a trace of the one-eyed man—as I came to tell thee at the monastery gate!"

Bugs laughed. His brain was working again.

"Never mind," he said. "Let the others continue to seek until I have better game for them—but I am now thinking that the one-eyed man is like a mere water buffalo that gets in the way when the hunters seek tigers—a nuisance, hardly worth shooting at. Good-night!"

"Good-night, *sahib*!"

But there would be no sleep for Bugs that night. On such important cases he regarded sleep as a mere waste of time, until exhausted nature made him close his eyes. He got out of the chair and began making up as a native—a very low-caste native, a *topas*, one of those pariahs who perform the filthiest of necessary tasks in India. Then he put out the light, and went down the fire escape as noise-

lessly as a lizard. . . . In the street he mingled with the crowd not at all—being careful to walk mostly in the roadway as the low estate of his religious birth (low-caste Hindoo) commanded.

IN THIS guise he reached the police station again, entering as one of the *topasses* who nightly clean up the halls and offices. There was still a light in Williams' office. Bugs went to the door and opened it. Williams was alone, writing at his desk.

"Never mind cleaning up here yet," he growled. "Get out!"

"Send that cable to New York yet?" drawled Bugs.

"Good Lord, how you startled me! Yes, I sent it, you blooming low-caste Hindoo, you—you had me utterly fooled, Bugs. You're a marvel! No answer yet, and I doubt if there will be one of any help to us. Briggs might never have been in New York—just wrote the name of the city on the hotel register because he had to write some name. And his name might not be Briggs, and there are lots of Briggs's in New York. Even if he had a police record it would take a long time to check up on him—if it could be done at all!" answered Williams.

"I was going to suggest you save the poor government the price of the cable," drawled Bugs. "Glad my make-up is all right. I want the *dossier* of that *babu* lawyer who defended my one-eyed friend—there are so many Lal Muckergees that I don't want to go to the wrong house. Bit of a shyster, eh?"

"Yes," said Williams, "but we have nothing on him. As you know, Bugs, lots of such lawyers defend thieves for three-fourths the value of the loot, but we never proved it on Lal Muckergee. Maybe we had other things to do that were more important!"

"Thanks," said Bugs. "I will now try

to get a job as a *topas* in a high-caste Hindoo's house. Lovely prospect. Lal Muckergee interests me."

He went from the *thana* up the rise, and then turned to the right toward the district of the rich Hindoo. He was careful to avoid kicking a sacred cow that bothered him, and this care was not due to his being in his bare feet! He had no trouble at all in entering the servants' quarters of Lal Muckergee's house. After all, a *topas* may be a Hindoo, if a very low one. . . .

THE usual monkey-like chattering among the servants as they squatted about a charcoal brazier and smoked their queer pipes—which look like coconuts with a hole out of which they suck the tobacco, the bowl stuck in the top, in another hole. The chattering castes were well marked, and only a *topas* shared a pipe with a *topas*, and so on up the caste line. Bugs had no desire to suck at a *topas's* pipe! He chewed betel-nut vigorously, which was not quite so nasty.

They chattered, and Bugs learned many things about the master of the house, Lal Muckergee. About his opium hour, and other things. Then Bugs left the servants wrapped in an argument. He apparently melted into the night.

Thus it came about that the ponderous Lal, at the time appointed by his hungry nervous system, waddled into his most sacredly private room. To appreciate how private this was one must understand something about the privacy of the East. He lighted a small brass lamp with ruby glass. It threw a kindly glow upon the comfort of the divan, upon the soft cushions, and rugs. But, to the horror and rage of Lal Muckergee, it also threw its mellow light upon an unspeakable, an untouchable outcast of a pariah—a *topas*! A *topas* who reclined in apparent comfort in Lal's pet, imported from London arm-

chair! For a moment Lal was too astonished, too outraged to speak. But when he recovered he spoke as only a high-caste native of India can or would speak to another man.

This thing of low caste, who had polluted the chair, so that Lal could never again use it without losing caste, without defiling himself—and so on.

And then Lal almost fainted. His frenzied utterances, his threats of punishment and torture were suddenly halted by:

"Shut the door, and shut up!" commanded Bugs in English.

"What?"

"Shut the door!"

"You police, eh?" countered Lal. "This entrance is illegal. No search warrant. I will complain to authority. I will have you dismissed. I will have my servants burn your feet. I will——"

No man ever lived who could draw quicker than could Bugs. The dumfounded and frightened Lal Muckergee saw suddenly in the hands which a moment before had been empty—a revolver which was pointed at him.

"Shut the door and sit down, damn you!" growled Bugs, affecting a roughness foreign to him. "There is no search warrant required when I arrest a man for murder!"

"Murder!" gasped Lal, shutting the door and obeying Bugs by taking a seat.

"As an accessory to murder, I tell you you are under arrest," went on Bugs.

"But this is absurd! I am a well-known lawyer. You have made a mistake!"

"If I have," drawled Bugs, "the mistake will be righted. You will, of course, be detained a few hours—probably all night at the police station. If I am mistaken, then, the police will apologize. You may even bring suit. But you will stay in jail all night! Are you ready to go?"

"My servants will——" began the scared *babu*.

Bugs lifted his gun significantly.

"I don't expect any trouble with your servants," he drawled. "In the way of duty the law allows me to shoot to kill—every one who tries to interfere with an officer of the law. Are you ready to go with me, *babu*?"

The *babu's* eyes were wide—the pupils dilated with the craving of the opium hour. To be compelled to spend a night in jail would be torture, because opium smoking was not permitted by the *thana*—the police. . . .

"May we not wait?" he pleaded, the need of opium driving him, as Bugs had calculated.

"Wait?" snapped Bugs. "What do you mean—wait?"

"I am innocent man!" the *babu* shivered. "I am a member of the Bar! I am graduate of Oxford University! I am a gentleman! You should not be rough with me, Mr. Policeman, who are so clever at disguise. I—I would like to wait here a little while. I will not try to escape!"

"When one arrests a man in connection with a murder charge one does not wait for the convenience of the accused," said Bugs gravely.

"But—but, can not you see, sir?" the *babu* broke down utterly. Tears ran down his cheeks, his vast body trembled like a jelly. He was in great pain, and the situation had become too much for him. With his need of opium had come that dreadful feeling of fear which comes when the need grows acute, accentuated horribly by being accused of murder and the dread of spending hours, or days, or weeks, in a cell without the opium to which he had for years been addicted. "Sir, Mr. Policeman, be merciful. . . . I—I must smoke!"

"Well, light a cigar and come along,"

said Bugs, as if he did not understand. "I don't mind your smoking."

"Can't you see? Can't you see?" wailed the *babu*. He seemed about to fall on his knees before Bugs. "It's—it's opium I need!"

"I have seen that for—for some time," replied Bugs. "And you are certainly in bad shape. In such bad shape that you, a lawyer, have never even asked who was murdered—who accused you of having, er, helped to murder!"

"That's because I never murdered anybody—what do I care who has been murdered when I know I am innocent of any murder?" For a moment his sense of innocence gave the *babu* strength.

"The murdered man floated down the river this morning, in a *sanpan*, naked, with a top hat on, a cigar in his mouth, a crucifix in his hands!" said Bugs.

"Ah!" the *babu* became as indignant as his sufferings would allow. "And you think I am such a fool as to do a thing like that?"

"Not you—you helped, that's all. The thing was done by a one-eyed client of yours, one Frangpau!"

"He did not do it," the *babu* fell on the floor, his nervous strength altogether gone. "He never killed in his life, either. A bully, yes! A big rough brute, but no killer. My God, let me smoke!"

"You have seen Frangpau today," Bugs went on unmercifully. For a moment he paused, his brain working. "Yes, he is here in this house!"

"My God," groaned the *babu*; "who are you?"

"I, too, am an Oxford man," said Bugs gently. "My name is Sinnat!"

The *babu* heaved to his feet. He took hold of Bugs' knees, apparently indifferent to the gun. "This is—an honor. You are—ah, the greatest man in Burma. But I am completely innocent. And, for God's sake . . . for the sake of the old Col-



lege . . . please, Sinnat *sabib*, let me smoke one pipe!"

"If I do you will tell me all I want to know?" said Bugs.

"Everything, sir!" the *babu* answered eagerly.

"Go ahead and smoke," said Bugs.

"God bless you," said the *babu*.

A MINUTE later he was inhaling hugely, and the pungent smoke of opium filled the room. Bugs had no doubt that the *babu* was innocent. And he had been convinced for hours that the one-eyed man had not done the murder. At first it had seemed that Frangpau was a tool—he might have fastened the body in the *sanpan*. If he had done that, then he had killed the *sanpan waller*. And, as Bugs had deduced, the reason the little men had failed to find him was because he was hidden in the lawyer's house. As Bugs had hinted to the Snake Man, however, a new theory was growing in his mind. And if he could entirely eliminate the *babu* and Frangpau from all connection with the murders, then the new theory took on added plausibility. He sat there quietly, thinking hard, while the *babu* gratefully smoked opium.

"Answer my questions truthfully, *babu*," said Bugs, "and I give you my word of honor not to use what you tell me against Frangpau. This will protect your honor as regards your client. Unless Frangpau killed a man today I am not interested in him. When you feel more comfortable let me know, and I will ask you the questions."

"I accept your word, Sinnat *sabib*," answered the *babu*, whose nerves were becoming quiet. "You have deduced that my client, scared to death, as you might say, is hiding here. When he heard about the body of the *sanpan* man being found near his place, he got fearful. Then when a policeman pretended to be running

away . . . down Frangpau's passage . . . ah, but of course that was you. Gad, you are clever! In a moment I will be able to talk more coherently."

"He threatened me, believing I had run amuck and tried to knife a Sikh—threatened to keep me prisoner because . . . I see! He meant to run and let the police know in some roundabout way that a man was hiding in his godown, a man who had tried to knife a Sikh. I see! He was scared he would be accused of the murder, and so he, with seeming generosity, took me down there so that the police would find me, and accuse *me* of the murder of the *sanpan waller* whose body had been found so near Frangpau's strange opening to the river! For of course Frangpau did not connect the murder of the *sanpan waller* and the murder of the white man in the *sanpan*—only the police knew the license number of the *sanpan*. Frangpau did not even know whose body had been found under the wharf!" said Bugs.

"With your brain," the *babu* gasped in admiration, "you do not need to ask questions! You can figure out for yourself!"

"Thanks," drawled Bugs. "But you must tell me just why Frangpau has made that remarkable arrangement of underground places!"

"He did hear that a *sanpan waller's* body was the body discovered," said the *babu*, "but he was afraid to ask questions. That place underground, that opening to the river—surely you know what that is. I would rather you told me than that I, er, betrayed my client!"

"I have no interest in a receiver of stolen goods from river pirates!" grinned Bugs.

"Now you know all about Frangpau," murmured the *babu* thankfully.

"Yes," answered Bugs. "And good-night, *babu*. . . . I am quite sure that neither Frangpau nor yourself knows any-

thing about the murders—you know no more than any newspaper reader. . . . I must go!"

"Some refreshment, sir?" asked the *babu*.

"No thanks, Muckergee! And of course you must not come to the door with me—it would look damnable queer for a Brahmin to be seen politely escorting such a low-caste person as I appear to be to the door of his house, eh?"

"You are a wonderful man, Sinnat *sahib*!" said the *babu*.

IT WAS nearly two in the morning when Bugs reached his room again. He had no time for sleep, for he had to arrange a difficult disguise—difficult in the sense that he had to take with him certain credentials. It was the hour before the dawn when he left his room again, when that strange, salt breath from the Bay of Bengal strays over the capital of Burma.

Early workers were about as Bugs walked slowly, with bent, devout head, toward the central monastery. As the day came with its sudden, scented splendor he was presenting himself at the entrance of the *pongys'* dormitory—as a pilgrim monk who had trudged from the far rock temple of Powingdaug, a pilgrimage of months, so that he might acquire merit in his next incarnation, both by his pilgrimage and by the honor he did to himself by bowing at the shrine of the tooth of the Blessed One, Gotama Sidhatha, the Glorious Buddha!

Bugs knocked on the old teak door of the *pongys'* dormitory, as the rising sun drenched the ancient place with light. An old monk, the dean of the *pongys*, opened it. Bugs bowed very low.

"I, father, am an unworthy stranger who seeks to honor himself and acquire merit by visiting this sacred place. I have walked from far-away Powingdaug, and I have here with me my credentials,

written for me by Ard-byu-sin, the blessed Abbot of Powingdaug!" said Bugs.

The dean of the monks extended his hand for the paper. While he read it Bugs mused: "I hope my writing of the Burmese is near enough to that of old Ard-byu-sin's. He's a good old chap, and I would not want him to think unkindly of me. But it's hardly likely that this old monk is an expert on penmanship—even if he has ever seen the Abbot's writing."

The wrinkles on the old dean's face were merging into a smile of welcome. He courteously returned the paper to Bugs.

"You are more than very welcome," he said, opening wide the door. "And you must be weary. I beg you to refresh yourself with us at our morning meal."

Bugs' voice trembled with emotion as he answered.

"Good father, I thank you gratefully. But I have come very far for merit! Permit me, then—and, oh, be not offended!—to first bow myself at the blessed shrine—to prostrate myself at the shrine of the Tooth of our Blessed Lord, Buddha! . . . After that, if you will, I will refresh myself!"

The old *pongy* closed the door. His voice broke in a sob, as he said: "Friend from far places, I feel my heart breaking at the news I must tell you. My brother, you have come a long way—to find an empty shrine! The Tooth of the Blessed One has been stolen!"

"Stolen!"

Bugs screamed like a wounded hare. Other monks crowded about him, sympathizing.

"But I have come so far! So far! So far!"

He wailed like a man who had lost his sweetheart, by death, on their wedding day. His voice echoed through the ancient monastery. Every man in the place, except the Abbot and some who

could not leave their tasks, came quickly. From among these a deep voice spoke reprovingly.

"The loss is as much, if not more ours than thine, brother! Do not think all the grief is thine!"

It was the big Shan monk who had taken Bugs to the shrine, who had shown him the hole in the wall and the unfortunate guard in the dungeon.

"You are weary, brother," added the dean gently.

"Yet I must kneel at the violated shrine," murmured Bugs, tottering feebly forward. "Will you show me the way?"

He looked into the heavy, dark face of the Shan monk as he made the request. That one nodded and pointed to the passage leading to the shrine. And Bugs went in there and knelt. Several other devout Buddhists from outside, not monks, were there before him. . . .

**B**UGS crouched like a very weary and sad man.

"*Om mane padme hum!*" ["Ah, the Jewel of the Lotus! Oh!"] As it would be in English.

Other worshippers were coming in—kneeling on the floor one behind the other, in rows.

The murmur of the streets, coming through the hole which—as Bugs had suggested on his first visit—had not been closed up again. The subtle, monotonous murmur of prayers. . . . Bugs was very tired and sleepy. He was watching the worshippers carefully, but his eyes were heavy and he almost dozed.

Voices. . . . Peddlers crying their wares. . . . The distant, discordant calls of the bramely-kites, and the caw of crows. . . . Voices. . . . Bugs felt the need of strong tea. . . . Voices. Voices that seemed to enter his consciousness like ghosts, from nowhere. . . . Prayers repeated until the sound of them was

meaningless as the prattle of a river. . . . And the noise of Rangoon. . . . Noise coming through that hole, when both the imprisoned guard and the big Shan monk had said that they had heard no sound the night the Tooth of Buddha was stolen! The whine of a street car, the hoot of a motor horn—coming from the outside, through the hole, not through the solid teak walls, breaking into the soft murmur of "Ah the Jewel of the Lotus" like the noise of a boat upon a stream. . . . Bugs bit his lips, blinked his eyes, shook his head slightly—otherwise he could not have kept awake. The sounds were hypnotic.

Then, suddenly, a sound that was not of the stream of sounds. A voice speaking quickly, sibilantly. Some emotion in that voice—a heavy voice. What was that emotion? The speaker was trying to hide it, trying to control his voice. . . . Then another voice. The voice of an old man who was angry—who could not control that anger in his voice, though he was speaking as softly as he could. . . .

Bugs was very wide awake now.

Footsteps in the room of the shrine. . . . More worshippers? . . . A large shadow under the little lamp. . . .

The big Shan monk, his face distorted with some sort of passion. . . . And, kneeling ostentatiously, the old man on whose forehead Bugs had seen the Hindoo caste-mark. But there was no mark there now. And that faint mark the day before, that displaced headgear, had only been seen by Bugs.

He did not kneel there long. Hardly three minutes. When he got to his feet the Big Shan monk was leaving the room. They went out together. And Bugs, a weary, tottering pilgrim, who, too, looked like an old man, followed them. Followed them out to the courtyard, walking very quietly. There the



big Shan turned suddenly. He spoke to Bugs.

"Are you going without breakfast—somewhere?" he asked.

"My soul is too sad for food," answered Bugs. "I will walk up the hill to the great Shwe-dagon pagoda, and make my obeisance there."

"It is well, brother," answered the Shan.

The old Hindoo took no notice of Bugs. There are so many such pilgrims in Burma. Bugs walked slowly ahead. He knew that the two were talking heatedly. . . .

As the bare feet of Bugs stirred the dust of the street outside, he saw the faithful but dejected Snake Man, and made the sign to him. Fifty yards away was another of Bugs' little men. The old Hindoo was coming through the gate of the monastery. The little man fifty yards away had flashed the signal to another of the eleven. As the old Hindoo left the monastery the signal was reaching every one of the eager little *jungly walkers*.

"They will not lose him this time," muttered Bugs. "He dodged the Snake Man, but not intentionally. It was an accident. He did not know he was shadowed."

THE Shan had disappeared, but Bugs continued to walk slowly in the direction of the great pagoda. At a corner of the street he turned away. And in a few minutes he was in his room again, drinking the tea of which he felt so badly in need.

"What an interesting time would have been had by all—if a single monk had discovered that that old man was not a Buddhist but a Hindoo!" he muttered. "Which fact, of course, puts that big Shan in about the worst light a man can be in

—in India! It is the first time—perhaps the first time in history—the first time I have heard of such a thing. It is as extraordinary as it would be for a Mohametan *mullah* to welcome a Christian pork-butcher, carrying a sample of his wares, into a mosque!"

Bugs lit his pipe, and went on.

"It was, indeed, worse than that. Because the Hindoo pretended to be a Buddhist, and so desecrated the most sacred shrine in all Buddhism!"

The telephone rang. It was Williams, the police superintendent.

"Bugs?"

"Yank!"

"Last night somebody broke into the room that chap Briggs had in the hotel. Went all through it! Turned it upside down. Even tore the paper off the walls, and broke the furniture."

"So?" drawled Bugs. "I am not surprised! Might even say that I half expected something like that would happen!"

"What?" exclaimed Williams.

"Any word from New York?" asked Bugs.

"No!"

"Didn't expect there would be," said Bugs. "You will probably get a cable saying the New York police can't place Briggs. . . . I will see you sometime today. Good-bye!"

Bugs drank some more tea.

"This very strange affair, and I can not remember one more strange, is about to come to a head," he murmured. "I believe I have most of the factors of the problem, but the putting of them together to make a solution is—er, risky!"

He took a bath, and had some breakfast. Then he dressed as an Englishman, phoned for a government car and was about to start for the monastery as the

representative of Lord Cameron when the Snake Man appeared—smiling.

"We have found the place, *sahib!*" said the little *jungly waller*.

"Good!" exclaimed Bugs. "Rich man, eh?"

"Very fine house, that old man has," said the Snake Man. "Many servants. But rude. I asked for a meal of curry and rice, but they told me to go to hell—which is not a decent telling!—and spoke about beating me with rods!"

Bugs laughed contentedly.

"Did you happen to mention that the High Priest of your religion is the Dreaded Devil of the Chin Hills, and that you are an expert in telling fortunes from warm chicken livers—the killed bird being exactly seven months old?" he asked.

"Yes, *sahib*," answered the Snake Man. "That I did when I became angry with the servants—as became my honor!"

"All right, but do not allow the servants to see you again," replied Bugs. "You no doubt told them their futures were, er—clouded!"

"Very black things did I tell them, *sahib*—they deserved such a telling," agreed the Snake Man.

"Keep out of their sight, venture not too near the house of the rich old Hindoo. But keep *him* in sight—that is, order my other men never to allow him to leave the house without following him! After giving the others this order do you wait outside the old monastery—I may need you. Here are ten rupees. . . . I now go to the monastery," said Bugs; and the Snake Man slipped down the fire escape.

THE big car purred its way to the monastery courtyard. Bugs nodded, as it were, to the huge pillars of the gateway.

He murmured: "That extraordinarily

set-up corpse! And the theft of the Tooth—equivalent to the theft of the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London. All this within the same hour, in the same city!"

He asked for the big Shan monk, after ringing the strange old bell at "The Entrance of the Alien Guests." The big monk appeared tired, and his face drawn. Bugs spoke sympathetically.

"You are worried, and I can understand. Such a loss! But rest assured the government will never give up until this priceless relic is again restored to the Shrine."

"The government!" The monk for a moment forgot his politeness—his voice rasped. Then, "Pardon me, but, as you say, I am upset—I can not sleep. I fear, *sahib*, that all the power of the British Empire can never restore the Tooth to its Shrine!"

Bugs laughed good-naturedly.

"Well—we will do our best, anyway. And now, will you permit me to interview that guard who slept on duty?"

The monk opened the passage door and led the way, after an apology for doing so. Bugs felt his heart thumping. From his mind a great truth was breaking—painfully. That strange intuitive faculty which had made him famous was burning in a clear flame. But he was not flattering himself.

"Of all the blasted numbskulls," he was thinking, "I am the prize article. I take the cake. The penny bun, as that music hall comedian used to say. My God, what a stupid ass I have been!"

He hesitated behind the monk, as if about to turn and leave the monastery. Then he followed on.

"May as well talk with the poor chap," he thought.

But when he stood in the dungeon "Bugs," Horace Sinnat, Indian Secret

Service, 006, Domestic, knew where the missing Tooth of Buddha was hidden!

"And that's why they killed him!" he muttered.

THE poor imprisoned monk appeared starved. Bugs wondered at this. Was the man doing penance, as it were, or was he denied food? The big Shan was obviously his jailer. What a lot of power that big Shan seemed to have in the monastery!

"He looks sick," said Bugs.

The big Shan shrugged his shoulders. "He is lucky to be alive," he said cruelly.

"There might be a difference of opinion about that," snapped Bugs.

The surprised Shan stared at him. Bugs felt something reptilian in those eyes. He went on diplomatically.

"I referred to the old philosophical problem of evil and pain, which the Blessed Buddha so nobly discussed," he said. "Is it lucky to be alive?"

The monk smiled.

"Sometimes, clever man!" he said slowly.

Bugs took a paper out of his pocket.

"I am going to make a test," he said, "of this imprisoned monk who slept at his post of guard. It is known as the Binet, or Wundt word test. You see, here are words. And here is my stop-watch!"

The monk from the Shan States frowned. This psychological test was so far beyond his knowledge that he suspected it. But he could not refuse the representative of the governor of Burma.

Bugs addressed the prisoner.

"When I speak a word, tell me in return the first word that comes into your head after you hear the word I speak," he commanded.

He took a pencil out of his pocket; then with stop-watch and paper went on

with the test—the frowning Shan watching avidly.

"Thanks," said Bugs after it was over. "I wished to find out," he said to the Shan monk, "if this prisoner knew anything about the stealing of the precious relic. He knows nothing—as my test proves."

The Shan smiled cynically.

"Is there some magic in that asking of words?" he asked.

"The purest of magic—pure science!" drawled Bugs.

"Will it lead you to the missing Tooth and the thief who stole it?" asked the Shan.

"Oh no," replied Bugs cheerfully. "I don't need it for that."

"What do you mean, *sahib*?" said the Shan slowly.

"Quite a lot! Yes, quite a lot, as they say in America!" answered Bugs.

And with this cryptic answer he left the monastery.

BACK in his room he phoned the governor.

"Forget the strain upon your august mind, Pickhead, my son!" he drawled.

"Great Scot, Bugs!"

The governor's answer was as lilted as Bugs had known it at school. Bugs' words had told him that the greatest of all secret service men knew that, again, he would succeed.

"Can you retrieve the, er, dentist?" went on Lord Cameron.

"Feel pretty confident, but, of course, unkindly fate may have butted in—I must hurry!" replied Bugs.

"Find out anything about that murder case?—I won't keep you if you are in a hurry," the governor spoke quickly.

"That bizarre matter was the guiding hand," drawled Bugs. "So long!"



He hung up and called Williams, the superintendent of police.

"Get me five Sikhs," he said. "Post them about that old dock, with the news that the Department of Buildings has declared the place unsafe. Keep every one away! It must be so considered for an hour or so, and then declared safe again. This is probably silly of me, but I am nervous about—about something! Come there yourself—you will get there before I can. All this may be like locking the stable door after the horse has been kidnapped, but—hurry them blooming Sikhs, Yank!"

Bugs threw off his good clothes—he did not wish any one to see him in his guise of governor's representative where he was going. He slipped into faded dungarees. As a somewhat grimy stoker from some steamer he went out. The Snake Man met him.

"What word, *sahib*?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Bugs. "Just keep on as you were. If you see a big Shan monk leave the monastery, watch where he goes."

Then Bugs hurried, walking, to the old dock where the body of the *sanpan waller* had been found, from which the clothes of the murdered Briggs had been recovered.

"And," he muttered as he hastened, "that remark of mine to the Shan—'quite a lot, etc.'—should compel a meeting. Lord, I hope no one has got ahead of me—by accident!"

As BUGS reached the river the deep whistle of a large steamer woke the echoes. She was leaving P'ingoon, going down-river.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bugs. "Now, I wonder! But there are so many steamers going in and out—and so many people on them!"

He was perspiring freely when he reached the old dock. The Sikhs were unostentatiously posted to warn people away from its lack of safety. One was putting up a barrier. Bugs saw Williams, and the Yank came forward and ordered the Sikh to allow Bugs to pass.

"What now, old fellow?" asked the Yank.

"Let me think—and act a part," said Bugs slowly. "Watch me, but please don't say anything. For you may think I am crazier than usual!"

The old wharf was surrounded by a high board fence. At the place where the Sikh was putting up a barrier there had once been a gate. It was a small wharf, as wharves go, and for years had never been used for anything more pretentious than a landing for *sanpans*.

Bugs stood at the entrance, just inside the barrier. He appeared to be concentrating his mind upon something. He walked slowly from the barrier to the slight, narrow sloping platform where *sanpan wallers* landed what few passengers ever used that wharf. The sloping platform ran between heavy old piles—big but rotten logs, standing like a palisade. . . .

Bugs walked slowly. Suddenly he started, as if he had heard ominous sounds behind him.

"Ah!" he muttered. "At the first sound of the pursuers he waited a moment. Then he jumped forward, thinking to get away in the *sanpan*. He was about to step into the *sanpan* when he realized that he had not time to get away with the treasure that way. . . . He leaned against these old logs. . . . He had no time to get away. . . . He would have to pretend that he did not have it. . . . So he turned, and thrust it into . . . into . . . into"—Bugs' arm was thrust far in between two old piles—"into . . . ah . . .

Yank, old son . . . keep it strictly under your hat . . . but here, in its little gold case is . . . *the Tooth of Buddha*!"

And Bugs drew the treasure from its hiding-place. Only the sergeant Ruttan Singh and Williams saw the sunlight gleaming on the gold. The other Sikhs heard the words, but their sternly disciplined faces never betrayed their knowledge. They were trustworthy, of course—but Bugs had thrust the golden case, after one hasty look at the tooth it contained, under his stained dungarees. It was unlikely, but still, alien eyes might be watching—from somewhere with glasses.

"The age of miracles," the big American was panting with excitement. "The age of miracles is not past—when Bugs goes on a case!" he exclaimed. "You *knew* the priceless thing was there?"

"Unless some one had accidentally found it, which was unlikely," answered Bugs. "The people who wanted it didn't know where it was—I knew that! So I . . . well, after acting like a blockhead for twenty-four hours or so, I, or my subconscious mind, or whatever it is, managed to figure out where the thing was hidden." He paused, and laughed slightly. "I wonder if, after all the fuss over this thing through the centuries—I wonder if it really is a tooth of Gotama!"

"More likely the tooth of a coolie that some old priest palmed off on the monastery," grinned the American.

"No," answered Bugs gravely, "I don't think so. Now and then one may doubt the authenticity of a relic like this, but, somehow, I don't. You know the sort of 'psychic' feelings I get now and then. Well, Yank, somehow this thing under my coat gives me a sacred feeling—like a great cathedral, or an ancient tomb or something like that!"

"But . . . but," Williams, carried away

by the dramatic finding of the tooth, had for a moment missed the significance of it, "but this connects that weird corpse in the *sanpan* with the theft of the tooth!" he stammered.

"Of course," drawled Bugs.

"But the murderer . . . who was it?" demanded Williams.

"I will clear it all up within a few hours, I hope," replied Bugs. "To be candid I am not quite certain who used the stiletto. But I do know that it was not the one-eyed receiver of stolen goods whose place your men have been watching since yesterday. . . . Not a word to any one! I will tell Lord Cameron, of course, but until I see certain parties well locked behind the bars of your excellent jail this gold box with its treasured relic reposes in the vaults of the Treasury. . . . Drive me over to the government building, will you, old man?"

"But why the naked body in the *sanpan*, the cigar in its mouth, the top hat and the crucifix?" asked Williams.

"That is quite a question, Yank, quite a question!" drawled Sinnat. "Bide a wee! We have not reached the end of the story yet!"

THAT wandering *sais* [native groom] was a merry fellow! He could tell tales of love which would have made Boccaccio look to his laurels. He made all the servants laugh, and he made love to the women, with distant smiles, as it were, until they crowded to listen to his stories. He was a clown and an adventurer, and he had no trouble obtaining curry and rice, and sweet cake; indeed, such were forced upon him. He was apparently a Hindoo of decent caste, and had served several rajahs. . . . Yes, his love of women had gotten him into trouble! He admitted it! . . . Now, for that true and laughable tale of the sultan of

Swat! It was, the *sais* said, his best tale. Such a comedy! Such a sultan! . . . His wives said— The wives of the sultan, of course, were meant. The *sais* did not tell stories about his own wives. That was because he had never married. . . . Oh, no, *jut bat na junter*—the *sais* knew nothing whatever about telling lies!

Over the city the evening came. There is nothing like it in all the world. It is as if a fever patient suddenly finds the heaven of health and cool sweetness, with a kiss from a lovely woman—and the stars came out. Bugs had left his laughing audience. The Snake Man had signalled a message. The big Shan monk was leaving the monastery—as if about to go for a walk!

"I knew that what I said to the Shan would bring about a meeting," Bugs thought as he answered the signal. "But where will it be? For of a certainty a Buddhist monk will not come here—will not visit openly the house of a Hindoo—and he is walking out without any sort of disguise. Ah!"

The next moment he bowed servilely to the old Hindoo owner of the house. This one had come out and was crossing the compound. He took no notice of Bugs' bowing. This was usual, and not due to the very faint light. He walked rather swiftly. Bugs, among the deeper shadows, followed.

Where would they meet, these two strangely assorted criminals? And that at the moment was the rub of it—not the question of where they would meet, since Bugs and his men could follow both of them, but the fact that while Bugs had reasoned out the majority of the truths which proved the Shan and the Hindoo to be crooks, he entirely lacked evidence to bring about a conviction. His logic might convince a jury and a judge, but British law demands evidence not pure mathe-

metics. Bugs would have to get that evidence—how and where would he get it?

The old Hindoo was shuffling through the dark, along a street so narrow that no autos used it. Bugs nodded as the old man turned a corner.

"They will meet at the spice shop, where the old Hindoo dodged the Snake Man. How innocent is the owner of that shop, I wonder? And, of course, that is where the old Hindoo donned his Buddhist garb before going to the monastery, because of course he dared not be seen leaving his own house as a Buddhist!"

THE shop could be smelled before it was reached. The pungent aroma of aromatic spices. But there was no light in the place. The old Hindoo had stopped at the back door—the doorthrough which he had left when the Snake Man lost him. He was putting a key into the lock of the door. He showed no evidence of nervousness, so far as Bugs could see.

"Because he owns the place," deduced Bugs. "Things grow clearer!"

The old man opened the door suddenly, slipping quickly into the shop and locking the door after him.

"Now I will have to burgle to get in," muttered Bugs. "What a quiet little lane this is! The city sounds as if miles away."

He stood pressed against the door, listening intently. He could hear the old Hindoo moving about inside the shop. It was fairly obvious that he would admit the Shan monk through the other door. Bugs was as certain that the Shan would come as he was that the sun would rise in the morning. Like all grooms, Bugs carried some bits and snaffles—or, rather, like a native who wishes the world to know he is a groom he carried them. He had had some difficulty preventing these badges of his trade from jingling as he followed the old man. From amid this



stuff he now took several skeleton keys. Complicated locks are not common to native shops. He expected no trouble opening the door—unless the old man heard him.

"Hope the old brute's a bit deaf," he muttered as he inserted a key. "Ah!"

Quite clearly he heard the old man opening the front door of the shop. Bugs worked his key. He timed the opening to coincide with the old man's opening of the other door. Like an eel Bugs slipped into the dark, smelly place—but he did not lock the door behind him. He left his bits and snaffles outside. The old Hindoo did not hear a thing. There was no light in the place.

"He will not light a lamp," thought Bugs. "Not such a fool as to take that chance—a very secret meeting this!"

Just a whisper when the meeting began. The big Shan had come through the front door. The old man had locked it again. And two of the gang Bugs had come to think of as *The Twisted Three* were squatting in the dark of the shop, six yards or so from where Bugs lay hidden!

A whisper in Burmese, the Shan speaking.

"That government snake suspects something. So I sent word to thee for this meeting!"

"What can he suspect? We have left no tracks!" whispered the old man.

"About the Tooth, I mean," answered the Shan. "He does not believe the thief came through the hole I sawed after I put the guard to sleep."

"What of it?" growled the old Hindoo softly. "What I want to know is where Briggs hid the thing. I hired a room in that dirty hotel—in the servants' quarters. Paid a filthy yard man to let me have his bed. Then I went through the room Briggs had. Not a thing did I find!"

"Could he have thrown it into the

river—just before we, er, we gave his spirit permission to depart—to hell, as I hope?" asked the Shan.

The two men were no longer whispering.

"No!" The old Hindoo gritted his teeth. "The swine! After all the business we have done together! He tried to get away with the most valuable thing we ever—collected. Half a million dollars was what he said the man from New York would pay. They were to meet that night on the English steamer. The liar! For when I looked up the passenger list there was no such name as Briggs said would be there. And the steamer was sailing at midnight! Had we been five minutes later, Briggs would have gone down-river in the *sanpan*, and he would be well on the way to England by now!"

"I know all this." The Shan seemed very tired. "He *did* go down-river. And I . . . Hindoo, you seduced me into this felony. Your clever talk. And now my unhappy conscience will for ever haunt me!"

The old man laughed.

"Your *what*? What you craved was a hut up in the forest of the Chin Hills—women and babies. So, for the money I paid you, you did a job for me. Don't rant. And now—oh priest who tired of celibacy!—oh monk who outraged his vows!—now, as I said this morning, I want my money back. The job fell down. I was pleased when your poor soul became afraid of that government detective. For those fellows have no brains! But pleased I was when you arranged this meeting—here, alone in the dark—for I mean to get back my money. You dare not refuse! I am powerful, respected, lived here in Rangoon for years. I can easily get word to the Abbot about what you have done! And your fellow monks will tear you limb from limb! You might

think to implicate me! But when you think of being torn to pieces if you open your mouth—you'll keep it shut. So, you will return me the money and return to your monastery. No one will ever be the wiser! I promise you that. My silence, defiled priest, will be your reward. If you don't do what I say—then let Buddha help you!"

"Rat!" snarled the Shan.

"Not so rude," the old miser chuckled. "I have that old Italian stiletto in my hand. I might even make it look like suicide! The money, priest!"

Bugs heard the big Shan grind his teeth.

"I wonder," he growled, "if after all, you did not find the Tooth, and are hiding it! It's just like you to do that, and then demand back the money!"

The old man chuckled.

"How easily you become excited!" he said. "After I drove this fine knife through Briggs, and sent the *sanpan waller* to keep him company—he had hired the *sanpan waller* to row him down the river, and so, ha! ha! down the river they went—then you became excited. Insisted upon fixing him up like a theater show. You said it would throw the police off the track—look so mysterious. Maybe it did, but it was so funny watching you work that way—trying to 'disguise' a corpse. Ho! ho!"

"You are insane," growled the Shan. "But answer my question! Where is the Tooth?"

The old Hindoo laughed insultingly. And, suddenly, like an angry dog the big Shan launched himself at the old man! There was a short struggle, a thin scream. It was over before Bugs could stop it.

The big Shan was lying across the dead body of the Hindoo, the stiletto, wet with the Hindoo's blood, in his hand, when

Bugs covered him with his flashlight and revolver.

The Shan, speechless, stared at Bugs, terrified.

"Lie quiet," said Bugs grimly. "In case you do not recognize me, I am the government man who visited the monastery recently! Lie quiet now!"

The Shan did not move. He probably could not. Bugs blew his police whistle. Blew it again. The door rattled violently. It was the Snake Man.

"The other door," shouted Bugs.

The Snake Man ran around the building. Bugs continued to blow his whistle. The front door rattled again, as the Snake Man came in the back door.

"Open this door," said Bugs. "The key is in it!"

The Snake Man obeyed. A white sergeant of police and a Sikh rushed in, their flashlights lighting up the entire scene.

"What the——"

"I am Mr. Sinnat, Jenkins!" said Bugs quietly. "This monk is your prisoner. Take him to the station. Be very careful he does not kill himself. Search him for poison. I was afraid he might try to make me shoot him by trying to fight me. I will be down soon, and talk with him. The corpse is that of a certain rich Hindoo—have it taken to the Hindoo part of the morgue."

THE governor greeted Bugs joyfully. "You did it again, old chap! How? Was it intuition?"

"Some, maybe," answered Bugs. "A lot of luck helped. The intuitive part had to do with two such unusual crimes in the same city about the same hour! But I was very stupid. It took me a long time to realize that two such crimes *must* be related—the law of averages should have told me, knowing Burma as I do—the law of averages as applied to crime in

Burma, I mean. Crime in Burma may be brutal, but it is usually commonplace, seldom spectacular. And here were two spectacular crimes. When I realized that, and acted on that intuitive assumption, if it is intuition—then every bit of evidence that turned up tended to confirm the theory. But I will give you the details.

"Had I been really clever I should have known at once that there were three men—twisted together, as you might say, in crime. For that dead Briggs, all dressed up, was a perfect clue to a perfect logician, which I am not. Not even a mad murderer would dress up a corpse like that and sink the *sanpan waller*, after killing both with the same weapon. No, the dressing up indicated another man, *not* the murderer but connected with him, and *afraid of being found out*. The actual murderer had no fear of being found out! But the other, the Shan monk, had fear. You see, 'conscience makes cowards of us all,' and that Shan had done what to him was the most damnable thing a man may do. But I was not sufficiently clever to deduce all this at first. I had to get the facts first.

"Well, when the tooth was reported missing the solution began working in my think-tank. It was so pitifully obvious that the hole had been sawed from inside, and that the guard had been doped. I had a few words with Lal Muckergee, merely to clear the one-eyed man from my way. This left the obvious old Hindoo and the Shan monk. I don't have to tell you that a Hindoo praying in a Buddhist monastery is in itself a clue to some skulduggery—it looms like a danger sign. And when the old man went through the

spice shop! Well, he had a private room there, where he donned his Buddhist robe. He could not do this and walk out of his own house. He owned the store, and a well-paid Burmese ran it for him.

"The old Hindoo had become rich through miserliness and crooked work. Briggs, of course, was one of those Englishmen who go about the East—no, he was not an American: one look at his trunk was enough to show that—picking up what they can to sell to collectors. He would, if he could, steal a big ruby from a temple—'idol's eye' stuff, you know. This was the most ambitious project—stealing the Tooth of Buddha. He had worked with the old Hindoo for some years. Then Briggs, wanting all the loot himself, bought a passage on a steamer leaving at midnight. I looked up the passenger list, and found 'Walter Barlow, Manchester, England,' and the clerk described Briggs to me as Barlow. He had the *sanpan waller* waiting. But the old Hindoo and the Shan suspected this double-cross, and followed. You know the rest. But it was rather clever of the Shan to dress up the body that way in order to throw police off the track. Of course, a sneer at Christianity, both from the Hindoo and the Shan, suggested the crucifix. Which was bad for the Shan. Because that very clever chap who works for Williams, the finger-print expert, has clinched the case. The Shan perspired freely and his thumb print was on the crucifix! But I was not clever, Pickhead. I have good ears, though! When I was in the monastery, disguised as a Buddhist, I overheard something the old Hindoo said to the Shan monk!"





# The Further Adventures of Ali Baba

By ALLAN GOVAN

*What happened after the death of the forty thieves is entertainingly told in this story*

**H**AVE you ever felt that some of the stories in *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* leave you wondering? The Arabian story-teller has a habit of stating that his hero and heroine "continued in joy and happiness until they were visited by the Terminator of Delights and the Separator of Companions." Haven't you sometimes been conscious of the tiniest shadow of doubt about the joy and happiness?

For instance, the story of Ali Baba and the forty robbers!

The naïve writer of that story says that Ali married his deceased brother Cassim's widow and promised her that his other wife should not be jealous. One doesn't feel that that promise was worth a great deal. And it didn't seem to occur to Ali that the things in the robbers' cave were stolen property. Did he report the find to the police? He did not. He piously thanked Allah for his good fortune, and proceeded to convert the stolen goods to his own use—a course of action which was sure to lead to trouble sooner or later.

There were forty robbers. Is it reasonable to suppose that the whole forty were bachelors? It isn't. They had wives and families somewhere, who were not going to have boiling oil poured over their husbands and fathers without doing something about it.

Another point: throughout the story Ali Baba isn't particularly bright. It is his slave, Morgiana, who does all the clever things. In fact, the story leaves one with

the impression of a weakish man who would be almost certain to make a mess of things after Morgiana married Ali's son Hasan and was no longer at her father-in-law's elbow to do his thinking for him.

The present writer has consulted various ancient manuscripts preserved in the museums at Baghdad, Cairo and Teheran, and these manuscripts go to show that Ali Baba did *not* live happily ever after.

Ali Baba's first trouble, as could be supposed, resulted from his taking over Cassim's widow.

When Fatimeh, his other wife, heard of the proposal, she told Ali quite plainly: "If you think, Ali Baba, that I'm going to take kindly to sharing this house with Cassim's flat-faced wife and her two imbeciles of sons, then you're up a gum-tree;" and about a month after Ali's second marriage rites had been solemnized Ali's life was such a burden to him that he had begun to think that the Terminator of Delights and the Separator of Companions was taking a deuced long time in coming his way.

**T**HE chief bone of contention between the two wives was as to which of the families should have the secret of the cave (a secret which Ali had had the good sense to keep to himself so far). Life, in those days, was even more precarious than in these; and the wives lived in constant dread that something would happen to Ali before he had passed the secret on.

Khatoon, Ali's new wife, became at



*"He demonstrated to tourists how the door opened and closed magically."*

last convinced that the chance of Ali imparting the secret to one of her sons was a poor chance, so she decided to resort to strategy. She had heard from Ali how he had been hiding in a tree near the mouth of the robbers' cave when he learned the magic word that caused the door to open and shut.

So, next time Ali went to the cave to replenish the family cupboard, Khatoon followed him at a safe distance, waited until he had entered the cave, then climbed the tree.

Presently Ali appeared with several pouches stuffed full of pearls and rubies and other odds and ends. He had already opened his mouth to say "Shut, Sesame!" when there was a slight noise behind him. Ali swung round . . . and his eyes lighted on a woman's red leather slipper lying at the foot of the tree!

Three wild springs and a downward swoop, and he had the slipper in his hand. One glance at it told him all he needed to know.

"So ho, serpent!" he yelled. "So this is

how you repay me for marrying you and making my life one great longing for the comparative quiet of Paradise! Come down, scorpion, or by the beard of Suleyman the son of Daood (on both of whom be peace!) I'll——"

Khatoon came down—and the branch of the tree as well, right on Ali's head.

Ali was the first to recover. Tearing off his own slipper, which had a thicker sole than Khatoon's, he administered such chastisement as made Khatoon yowl for mercy.

"If you ever follow me again, she-adder," roared Ali, "I'll——" and the flourish of his slipper was more effective than words.

Having done what he considered to be his duty by his erring wife, Ali took his ax and cut down the tree so that nobody else should try the same trick on him. Then, sending Khatoon to a safe distance, he said: "Shut, Sesame!" after which he drove Khatoon home in front of him afoot while he himself bestrode his ass.

**A**FTER her adventure Khatoon was able to console herself with the thought that she had at least discovered where the cave was. Unfortunately there wasn't another scrap of cover where she could hide and hear the magic word. Yet Khatoon felt that there must be some way of learning the secret. She cogitated long and earnestly.

The result of Khatoon's cogitations was that she appeared one day before the cave of a local magician.

"Can you transform people into animals and things and then back again to their original shape?" Khatoon asked him.

The magician stroked his long white beard. "Provided it is made worth my while I——"

"What would your terms be for trans-

forming me into a raven, then back again to myself?" Khatoon inquired.

"Oh, I could do you a raven for—shall we say?—a hundred pieces of gold. . . . How would that suit you?"

"Inclusive terms, for both ways?" Khatoon asked.

"Prepaid," said the magician.

"Right-ho! I'll be along one day soon." Khatoon made for the door.

"My consulting-hours are the whole twenty-four," said the magician, and bowed her out.

Three days later Khatoon appeared again at the magician's cave, breathless with her haste.

"Quick," she said, "here are the hundred pieces of gold."

"If I remember rightly it was a raven that was called for——?"

"Yes, quick," said Khatoon. "No; wait a minute!" She held up her hand to stop him. "You're sure I'll be able to understand everything after I'm a raven?"

"It is only in the outward appearance that there is a change," the magician assured her; "you will still be your own charming self——"

"Good!" said Khatoon; "get busy and do your stuff."

The magician threw some powder into the brazier that stood in the middle of the cave. When the powder flared up he said certain magic words and waved his wand. . . .

A raven flew out through the door and made straight for the robbers' cave. . . .

**W**HEN Ali Baba arrived at the cave he looked about him cautiously. Within a hundred yards there wasn't as much cover as would have hidden a lizard. The only thing in sight was a raven, which stood with its head held to one side.

Ali Baba slid off his ass's back. "Open, Sesame!" he said, and strolled nonchalantly into the cave.



The raven gave one delighted croak, then made a bee-line for the abode of the magician.

Arrived at the magician's door, the raven walked smartly in . . . and gave one hoarse cry of dismay. For, lying stretched out on his bed was the magician . . . with his throat cut from ear to ear!

A glance round the cave made everything plain. While the magician was having his afternoon siesta some enterprising neighbor had crept in and slit the wonder-worker's throat before he got a chance to say any magic spells. That done, he had ransacked the place and carried off everything of intrinsic value.

Presently a certain raven had gone stark staring mad. In the hope of waking the magician it pecked at him furiously. But the magician had said his last spell, and was by now chucking the houris of Paradise under the chin.

"Oh, what shall I do, what *shall* I do?" wailed Khatoon, in a series of throaty croaks. "How can I ever explain to anybody that I'm not really a raven at all? If I had only had the sense to stipulate that I was automatically to return to my own form at sunset! What shall I do—oh, what *shall* I do?"

FOR three days the house of Ali Baba was bothered by a raven that would persist in coming inside.

"There's that durned raven again," cried Ali in exasperation on the third morning. "Have you forgotten how to throw stones?" he asked his youngest boy contemptuously. And almost in the same breath he said to Fatimeh, "Where *can* Khatoon have got to?"

"If you mention Khatoon to me again," said Fatimeh, "I'll yell. . . . Go and console yourself with one of your dancing-girls—you've got plenty of them in all conscience;" and Fatimeh stumped indignantly out of the hareem.

It must reluctantly be confessed that Ali Baba *had* spent quite a bit on dancing-girls—but if a man has had a sudden accession of wealth he's got to spend it on something. Ali's name had, in fact, become so well known as a buyer that every morning there was a queue of slave-dealers lined up at his door wanting to show him some very special lines they had in stock.

Also—and it is with regret that this is confessed—contrary to the wise rules laid down by the Prophet, Ali had allowed himself to acquire a taste for the more expensive products of the grape industry. Fatimeh told him repeatedly: "A man with a brain like yours should stick to sharbet: one of these days when you're squiffed you'll give the whole show away and then the lot of us will be up before the Kadee."

But when Fatimeh spoke like that Ali merely smiled superiorly, clapped his hands, and told his slave to bring him "The same again!"

It was when Ahmad Kamakim, a wealthy merchant, called for supper that Fatimeh got really scared.

Ahmad was enjoying the supper, and was in the act of complimenting Ali, for the third time, on his taste in dancing-girls . . . when suddenly his words froze on his lips. His trembling forefinger stabbed the air in the direction of a golden bowl laden with fruit which a slave had just brought in.

"My bowl!" he shrieked wildly, and for a moment could make no other sound.

"Your what?" asked Ali peevishly.

"O Allah—my golden bowl!" Ahmad had struggled to his feet. He seized the bowl from the hands of the slave, tipped the fruit on to the floor, and began to turn the vessel over and over, handling it lovingly.

"Here! steady with those bananas and pomegranates!" Ali protested.

But Ahmad's bushy black brows had now come together threateningly. His red-dyed beard was bristling. "Where did you get this bowl?" he demanded sternly.

"Where did I——"

"——get this bowl?"

Ali knew perfectly well where he had got it—from the cave, like the other stuff. But he could hardly explain that to a comparative stranger.

"I bought it from a Jew," he lied.

"Where did the Jew get it?"

Ali raised protesting hands to high heaven. "Allah (whose name be exalted!) alone knows where Jews get things."

"Would it surprize you to learn"—said Ahmad accusingly—"that this bowl was stolen from me some years ago by a band of robbers that attacked my caravan?"

Ali shook his head. "After some of the things that have happened to myself, nothing would surprize me."

Ahmad looked round the apartment—a man can't quite suddenly become wealthy without exciting suspicion. "It would be interesting to know where quite a lot of the things in this house came from originally," he said.

"Very interesting," Ali agreed—he had often wondered about some of the things himself.

"Where is this Jew's shop?" asked Ahmad.

"Where is——" That was a poser. Suddenly Ali felt himself beginning to get all hot and uncomfortable inside. "He's—ah—he's gone away."

"Where to?"

"Eh—er—to Cairo." Ali realized that the sweat was now trickling down his nose.

"Funny thing!" said Ahmad.

"Very," Ali concurred, and bent his head while his slave Abdallah whispered

something in his ear. The something was an instruction from Fatimeh, who had been listening from behind the hareem curtains, that if Ali wasn't an out-and-out jackass he would give Ahmad the bowl and so help to silence his wagging tongue.

Ali took the hint. He pulled himself together, and snorted indignantly. "May Et Taghoot get all robbers in the end and roast them for ever in Jahennem," he said piously. "Both them and all who traffic with them," he added just to make doubly sure. "Take the bowl, my friend, as a gift from me—there are plenty more where it—ahem!" said Ali when a loud warning sneeze came from behind the curtains.

"IT JUST so happened"—said Fatimeh on the following day when the whole position was being discussed at a family conference—"it just so happened that Ahmad Kamakim was murdered on his way home; so he will not be able to lay a complaint before the chief Kadee. But it was a near thing."

"My advice," said Morgiana, "is that we all clear off to Samarkand or somewhere with as much of the loot as we can conveniently take with us. We can arrive there as a rich Persian family and nobody will question us or recognize any of the stuff."

"Oh, shucks!" was Ali's only comment on that.

"I'm going to Samarkand, whether you all come or not," said Hasan—"I got a scheme for making money honestly."

"Huh! money-lending!" snorted Ali contemptuously.

"Better than money-lending. I got a scheme that——"

Fatimeh interrupted to ask Ali point-blank: "Are you or are you not going

with Hasan and Morgiana to Samarkand?"

"I'm nor," said Ali, so definitely that that finished the discussion.

The upshot of the family council was that Ali woke up one morning, out of what he felt sure had been a drugged sleep, to find that Hasan and Morgiana and their family were gone, also Fatimeh and his own family, with the exception of Khatoon's boys—and every bit of gold plate and every jewel and all the money in the house had gone too, and were evidently by now on their way to Samarkand to form the capital for that honest scheme which Hasan had in mind.

"There is no strength nor power but in Allah!" wailed Ali, and he threw dust on his head and rent his robes—and cursed Morgiana, Hasan, Fatimeh and the rest of the family, jointly and severally.

**W**ITH Morgiana and Hasan and Fatimeh and the rest of Ali Baba's family this account has nothing more to do, except to record that they founded the Samarkand branch of the Baba family. Hasan successfully carried out his intention. He originated and developed a lucrative trade in imitation Persian rugs, a trade in which his descendants are profitably engaged to this very day.

As for Ali Baba, he decided that he would start life all over again. What Hasan and the rest of them had taken from the house was a mere flea-bite compared to the wealth still lying at his disposal in the robbers' cave—enough to purchase all the wives and dancing-girls that the heart of man could desire. He took three asses and set off for the cave that very day.

After that very unfortunate experience with Khatoon, Ali had made a habit of reconnoitering carefully before crossing the open ground between the forest and

the cave. So, as usual, he left his asses well hidden and crept forward to the edge of the forest.

And the sight that met his eyes drew from Ali Baba a great groan of anguish; for there, right in front of the cave, were a score or more horsemen!

Even from that distance Ali could see that the horsemen were all mere youths. He understood. They were the sons of the forty robbers! Some old dotard had been able to give them a clue that had at last enabled them to find the cave!

The door of the cave was fast shut, but one of the horsemen was standing in front of it, bawling at the pitch of his voice.

Presently he stopped, and said something to another of the horsemen. What he said, Ali was too far away to hear, but it was, "Here, Mesood, you have a go at it—I'm hoarse. I've yelled at that blighted door every word, secular, sacred, and profane, that I can think of, and the drasted thing hasn't budged an inch."

Thereafter, for several hours, while his heart fluttered dizzily, Ali Baba lay and watched one youthful robber after another take his stand in front of the door and shout and roar at it until he was purple in the face. A score of times Ali could have sworn that he saw the door beginning to open, and a score of times the sweat oozed out of every pore of his body.

Toward midday the youthful robbers desisted, and Ali groaned afresh when he saw that the young man in command was giving orders to the others to prepare a camp. They weren't going to be easily discouraged!

Ali crawled back to his asses, mounted one, and wended his way homeward, unable to get his mind off those young men trying every word in their vocabularies. If one of them should hit on the right word! . . . The thought was very painful; Ali groaned once more.



He passed a wretched night, and when he got back to the edge of the forest again, the robbers were still there.

SOME days, some weeks, and some months went by, and the robbers had by now made a more or less permanent camp at the cave. In the meantime Ali had been very reluctantly compelled to turn some of his dancing-girls into ready cash—they realized a mere fraction of the figures he had paid the slave-dealers for them. But those that were left simply ate their heads off; so at last they all had to go.

It was when Ali Baba had reached this pitiable plight that the youthful leader of the robbers ran him to earth. The young man was introduced by Abdallah.

"My name is Seleem," he said. "I am the son of Cogia Houssain the captain of the robbers—the man whom your slave Morgiana stabbed. . . ."

"O Suleyman! O Daood! O day of misery!" moaned Ali. "Here, Abdallah, don't go away."

"I'll give you a share," Seleem promised. "If you come with me and open the door of the cave I'll give you a tenth share."

"You'd cut my throat after I had opened the door for you," said Ali, doing his best to keep his lip from quivering.

"I'll give you a quarter share."

"No."

"A half share. . . ."

"I've only got one throat," moaned Ali—"are you certain, Abdallah, that you bolted the door after you let this man in?"

Seleem talked long and as convincingly as he could, but Ali Baba had no illusions at all about robbers.

"Very well!" said Seleem at last; "some of our gang will keep an eye on this place, and if you stir outside, they'll nobble you;

and when they bring you to me, I'll grill you over a slow fire until you tell me the magic word." Seleem got smartly to his feet. "The peace of Allah be upon this house!" he said, and was gone.

So the position became an *impasse*. Ali knew that he daren't complain to the Sultan, for the Sultan would simply drive off the robbers and collar the loot for himself, probably throwing the complainer into jail for keeping the secret so long. All he could do was to hold on, and hope that the robbers would get tired of waiting before he himself was reduced to absolute starvation.

So he sent Abdallah out daily to pawn the remaining household effects and spare apparel. He would have instructed Abdallah to sell himself, but there would have been nobody to bring back the money. So he had to abandon that idea, although he was left with two mouths to feed.

ALI and Abdallah had begun to show signs of lack of proper nourishment when, without warning, a miracle happened.

"Here's somebody who asked to have a word with you," said Abdallah one day, ushering a young woman into the presence.

Ali Baba cast one approving glance at the young woman, and said: "Leave us, Abdallah! . . . Well, my dear?" he inquired, when they were alone.

"You don't seem to remember me," said the girl.

"Just for the moment I'm afraid I——"

"I'm Yasemeen. I was one of your dancing-girls. . . ."

"I had so many really charming girls that I can't quite call you to mind, but I'll take your word for——"

"You were very good to me."

"Was I really?"

"Yes. One night when you were—when you were particularly merry you gave me my freedom and a large emerald."

"That *was* nice of me."

"I'm still free, and I've still got the emerald." From the folds of her robe Yasemeen produced the stone and held it out in her rosy palm.

Ali's brows assumed an interrogatory pucker.

"I heard that you had struck a bad patch," Yasemeen explained; "and you had been such a darling old thing to me that I felt I ought to stand by you." Yasemeen paused. "And people are not always down in their luck, you know." Evidently she was trusting that her unselfish act would not go wholly unrewarded.

"But, my dear," said Ali, "just at the moment there isn't enough food in the house to provide one square meal."

Yasemeen clapped her hands and Abdallah appeared.

"Take this emerald to the Jews and get as much as you can for it, and when you've done that——" and Yasemeen told Abdallah what to bring home with him for supper.

"But my darling child——" Ali Baba began.

Yasemeen sank down on the cushions beside him, laid her soft cheek against his beard . . . and what Ali had intended to say further, remained for ever unsaid. . . .

Under the influence of the first square meal that he had had for some time, and the first decent wine he had tasted for days, Ali Baba allowed himself to relax; and before very long Yasemeen had his whole history from him, right up to the present date—with the exception of the magic word itself; Ali didn't let his gratitude run away with him altogether.

When she had it all at her fingers' ends Yasemeen said, "Let me think!"

She thought, and when she had done it for a while she proclaimed suddenly: "It's easy! . . . Listen to this, Ali.

"Send Abdallah for the captain of the robbers. When young Seleem comes, tell him that Allah has put it into your heart that you did wrong to take things from the cave. Your conscience is troubling you, and you want to make amends. Say you'll open the door in Seleem's presence, and will leave it to his generosity to provide for your declining years."

Ali sniffed. "To me, that seems a silly sort of——"

"Wait!" said Yasemeen. "He will agree at once, for he will tell himself that, after you have opened the door for him and he has got out the loot, he can cut your throat at his leisure."

"And that's just exactly what he will——"

"No he won't. When you open the door the robbers will be so eager to see what is in the cave, and so greedy to get their fingers on it, that they will all rush pell-mell inside. You will simply say the magic word that closes the door . . . and go peacefully home and remain there until the robbers have starved to death."

"Excellent!" cried Ali. "Excellent! Now why didn't I think of a simple scheme like that before. . . . Here, Abdallah!" and Ali clapped his hands for his slave. . . .

When it had all been arranged between Ali and Seleem, Yasemeen insisted upon going with Ali to the cave. Ali was inclined to demur.

"I know what you're thinking," Yasemeen told him. "You're thinking that if I go with you I will hear you saying the magic word. But you're such a simple old dear that you would be sure to make a mess of things if I wasn't there to give you a hint when required. Besides, if you're going to marry me, as you say you

are——" and she smiled on Ali in a way that put an end to the argument.

"All right, you can come," Ali agreed, and felt that life wasn't such a bad thing after all.

**I**N DUE course Ali and Yasemeen and the robbers foregathered in front of the cave.

Ali was about to pronounce the magic word when he paused for a moment. He addressed himself to Seleem.

"You swear by the beard of Suleyman (on whom be peace!) that you will provide for my declining years?"—Ali liked his joke.

"I swear it," said Seleem solemnly.

"Get on with the business," Yasemeen urged.

"All ready?" Ali asked Seleem.

"All ready," said Seleem, and the robbers held their breaths.

"Then . . . Open, Sesame!" said Ali Baba in a commanding voice, and at once the door of the cave swung open.

For a moment the robbers stood staring, hardly able to believe that the thing they had so long desired had happened at last. Then, helter-skelter, tumbling over one another in their haste, they rushed through the door, Seleem himself bringing up the rear.

"Now!" screamed Yasemeen, "shut it. Quick—quick!"

"Shut, Sesame!" yelled Ali Baba . . . and the last thing he remembered for a while was the sight of the door closing smartly; for something hard and heavy crashed down on his turbaned head and he floated away into the land of sweet oblivion.

**W**HEN Ali Baba came to himself he was lying, loosely pinioned, just outside the cave, the door of which was open. He heard a voice shouting, "Have you got everything?" and another voice

answering, "We've cleaned the place right out."

Ali twisted himself round as far as his bonds would permit, and saw a long string of heavily laden camels marching away, with the youthful robbers riding alongside.

Somebody gave him a kick to intimate that he was about to be addressed. It was Seleem.

"We've got to be moving now, Yasemeen and I," he said, and he smiled sweetly on the young woman, who smiled back at him the very same smile that she had lately smiled on Ali.

"I think you have already met my wife!" and Seleem waved his hand in the direction of Yasemeen. Then he laughed a loud, nasty laugh. "Let's get!" he said.

Ali Baba had again changed his opinion about life. Life seemed to Ali a poor, poor thing.

Then he recalled how, just before Yasemeen swiped him over the head, he had reminded Seleem about his promise. He wondered if Seleem had any softness at all in his heart. . . .

"You swore by the beard of Suleyman that you would provide for my declining years——"

"Your declining years are provided for," answered Seleem, and he explained how.

Then he and Yasemeen mounted the same horse, and Yasemeen kissed her hand to Ali as the horse galloped away after the rest of the caravan.

So during his declining years Ali Baba sat at the entrance to the robbers' cave and, at half a dirhem a time, demonstrated to tourists how the door opened and closed magically.

And he shared his crusts with a certain rather reary-eyed raven which refused to be driven away.

In our next issue Mr. Govan will relate "What Happened to Aladdin's Lamp."





# The Bend in the Road

By JAMES W. BENNETT

*A tale of Chinese rickshaw racing, and a Taoist monk who was not above risking money by betting*

**W**HEN Sandy discovered Waung among a group of rickshaw pullers on the Shanghai Bund, Sandy's scalp was visited by a tingling sensation—all too rare these days—which was an omen that luck was about to change for the better. He noted the coolie's exceptional height and magnificent legs.

Sandy hopped into Waung's rickshaw.

An exhilarating sprint up Nanking Road behind Waung intensified the conviction that here was an exceptional runner. Sandy wasted no time. He hired Waung as his private rickshaw boy.

Unobtrusively yet persistently Sandy let it be known that he had a paragon of a rickshaw coolie. At first the news awakened no echo of interest. In fact it had

aroused a certain skepticism. A sailor from the American gunboat *Villa Lobos* whom Sandy had managed during three disastrous prize fights, had proved that his jaw was made of a substance surprisingly like glass. And Sandy's efforts to interest his fellow Americans in the purely Oriental sport of quail fighting had been equally unfortunate, since the birds touted by him folded their wings and expired early in the struggle.

Before long, however, he heard a rumor that August Delafield, an operator on the Shanghai Silver Exchange, also had a rickshaw boy of exceptional speed. This brought a gleam to Sandy's faded, mournful eyes. August Delafield!

During a day of Race Week, the previous autumn, Sandy had been waiting his turn before a pari-mutuel booth, prepared to wager his shirt on a pony named *Foo-bah*. Delafield, in top hat, spats, morning coat and binoculars, had stopped at Sandy's side.

"Hello, Weeks. Isn't this the wrong booth for you? You don't want to bet on *Foo-bah*!"

"Why not, sir? He's a good pony."

Delafield lowered his voice: "*Foo-bah* was a good pony. But I've just been talking with his owner. He tells me that the animal is over-trained. Gone stale."

The broker strolled away. Sandy stood, first on one foot and then the other. Delafield was a friend of *Foo-bah's* owner. Could he afford to disregard this tip, straight from the feed-box? With a sigh, Sandy dropped out and moved over to the booth that was accepting wagers on the favorite.

*Foo-bah* won. Won with ridiculous ease. Gloomily Sandy had watched his money evaporate into the clear autumn air. A few moments later, he observed Delafield turning in a sheaf of winner's tickets—on

*Foo-bah*. The broker had deliberately talked the pony down, to keep the odds from mounting. Hurriedly Sandy had left the track to avoid giving way to the impulse to shake a skinny, freckled fist under Delafield's nose.

Now, as soon as Sandy had confirmed the rumor about the rival rickshaw marvel, he set out hurriedly to find the broker. He located Delafield in the lounge of that rendezvous of Shanghai's flashier business men, the Taipans' Club. Drawing from his trousers pocket a huge roll of bills—his stock-in-trade—Sandy spoke quaveringly:

"Mr. Delafield, I hear you have a rickshaw boy that you favor. I have one, too. I'll race mine against yours, any distance you name, even money. For this—a thousand dollars."

Delafield stared coldly at Sandy. He shook his head and buried it in a newspaper.

"Are you afraid to match your runner?"

The broker's face emerged from the journal. "You, probably have some professional foot-racer, Weeks. My coolie is an amateur. I'm not interested."

"No. Wait, sir." Sandy's red-rimmed eyes looked appealingly into Delafield's, and he put away the roll of bank notes. "Will you do this: race your boy against mine, tomorrow, without any stakes? Just for the sport of the thing?"

Delafield hesitated. Here, the bystander intervened:

"Go on, Del! That's fair enough! Call his bluff!"

The broker's habitual look of suspicion deepened, but, glancing at the ring of grinning, slightly malicious faces, he capitulated. . . . A few moments later Sandy left the Taipans' Club and an intricate scheme that had germinated in his mind was now beginning to flower.

SANDY'S initial preparations were simple. He visited seven or eight bars in Hongkew and, after purchasing small beers in each, told of the race. Coolly he strolled into the American Club—which had previously shown its dislike for his method of livelihood by blackballing him. Before departing, he spread the news. Similarly he brazened his way into the Shanghai Club and the Cercle Sportif Français. Nor did he neglect the hotel lobbies.

That night, thanks to Sandy's press-agenting, the foreign colony discussed the coming race. And the next morning, there was a sudden influx of population at Jessfield. That suburb just outside the International City had been chosen, since it was not subject to the interference of a Municipal Council that had forbidden rickshaw racing.

Along the curving road chosen for the course the spectators thronged. Near the finish were perhaps four hundred foreigners and lining the road were at least three thousand Chinese who had gotten wind of the race. Sandy sighed a trifle dolefully at the thought of giving this exhibition free.

Two Englishmen with well-known sporting proclivities were asked to serve as starter and finish judge. A Chinese grain-seller was pressed into service. On a steelyard he measured a hundred *catty* of rice—fifty pounds into each of two bags. These bags were tied to the rickshaw seats in order to add to the vehicles' momentum.

While this was taking place, Sandy shrewdly studied Han, the broker's rickshaw boy. The runner was short and stocky, with heavily muscled legs. His torso was wide; his pock-marked face was stubborn. He seemed capable of a steady gait, but Sandy doubted his ability in the way of a final sprint.

In contrast to Han's dourness, Sandy's boy, Waung, was grinning, confident, jiggling up and down between the shafts of his cart, enjoying the excitement.

The course was cleared, then the starter shouted:

"Catchee ready, boys? Then—*Go!*"

Each coolie gave a twist to pull his cart from the slight rut into which it had settled, grunted, took a dozen dog-trot steps—and began to race. Down the road they sprinted, neck-and-neck. Faster, still faster they went, the precious momentum from the carts aiding their speed. At the bend in the road, two-thirds of the way down the course, neither runner appeared to have the advantage. The last few yards, they fairly lifted themselves through the air, steadied and pushed by the weight of their loaded carts.

In a magnificent spurt, Sandy's Waung won by ten yards. After checking his rickshaw, he stood smiling, breathing easily. At his side Han drew up, panting with deep shuddering breaths, like a spent pony after a hard chukker of polo. Han stooped to rub one of his legs which had begun to cramp.

Watching the finish, Sandy was satisfied. He had proved his point—concerning which he had never had any doubt—to the satisfaction of the onlookers. Now he could go ahead with his scheme.

Lusty shouts arose from the Chinese who crowded around Waung, offering felicitations. An elderly Oriental in the blue robes of a Taoist monk pressed close to Waung and thrust in his hands a paper with a printed prayer, efficacious in warding off evil.

THAT evening, Sandy called at Delafield's flamboyant home on Bubbling Well Road, and sent in a thumb-marked card. There was such a long delay that Sandy wondered in some dismay if he



would be refused admittance. At last the broker's Number One Boy returned and—apparently mirroring his master's mood—curtly bade Sandy to enter.

"See here, Weeks, what have you come for?" growled Delafield. "I hope you're satisfied; your boy won."

"I'm not here, sir, to rub it in. Are you convinced now that your rickshaw coolie is outclassed?"

Delafield snorted. "Not only am I convinced—but so is the whole of Shanghai."

"That being the case, I want to talk to you about another proposition. You agree that all Shanghai believes my Waung can beat your Han over a mile stretch. That belief should be worth a lot of money to us."

"I'm not interested," said the broker shortly, repeating his words at the 'Tai-pans' Club.

"Not if you could make five thousand—ten thousand?"

"How?"

"In this way, Mr. Delafield. Tomorrow, you will make a statement that your coolie was out of training——"

"But he isn't, Weeks! He's in as good training as he'll ever be. There's not an ounce of fat on him."

"I know! But you'll say: give your man a chance to train and he can beat my Waung, hands down. And that you're willing to bet on the results——"

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" Delafield again interrupted. "I'm through!"

"Won't you please hear me out, sir?"

"Very well." The broker's voice was charged with surliness.

"You'll say that your runner is potentially the better. And that you're willing to wager five or ten thousand on him."

Delafield gave a loud, derisive laugh and Sandy went on quickly:

"I shall bet the same way. I've been

running into a bit of hard luck lately, but this is a sure thing and I'll dig up as much coin as I can. I'll leave the money with you—let you place it for me on Han. That thousand I showed you yesterday, I'll leave that with you."

"And how are you going to bring about this victory for my coolie?"

"Easily, sir. Waung will have an accident, during the race. He'll fall down—at that bend in the course, about two-thirds of the way along. If necessary, the night before, I'll wet the road there. When he hits that wet patch, his cart will skid and trip him. That's all the handicap your coolie needs. Simple, isn't it?"

Delafield made no reply and Sandy continued:

"To make it absolutely sure that Waung does fall, I'll station myself at that bend in the road."

The broker hesitated. "Even so, how am I to know that you'll do what you say?"

Sandy paused a moment and then he answered triumphantly:

"I have it! Suppose you station yourself at the bend. If Waung isn't afraid of me, he will be—of you."

Delafield's eyes glinted. "Yes, I can put the fear of God in him, all right! I know how that can be done. . . ." He was silent a moment. "It's risky, it's damned risky—but you're right: there should be a pile of money in it for us." He rose from his chair. "I'll go in with you. But remember this, Mr. Weeks: the slightest tricky move out of you and I reverse my bets. And you'll find yourself holding the sack!"

Sandy nodded and then left hurriedly, lest Delafield should change his mind.

THE night before the second race between his Han and Sandy's Waung, Delafield sat in his study fretting over a bank balance that was top-heavy by a

thousand dollars. He had put out a large amount in bets, but this remaining sum he had been unable to place on his runner, Han.

During the past fortnight, the broker had made careful statements about the rolls of fat that had festooned his rickshaw boy's midriff at the time of the first trial. He had promised that his runner would be in prime condition for the second race. That point made, he had begun to place his money. It had been accepted eagerly at first, but finally the opposition had begun to grow wary. Perhaps Han had been under-trained before?

As he was racking his brains in an effort to figure out a way to dispose of this last sum, his Number One Boy entered the study to announce a "Chinese man" below.

Thinking this to be a client, Delafield nodded. A tall elderly Oriental in the garb of a Taoist monk appeared at the door. Without preliminary, the Chinese began:

"My have got two thousand dollah. My wantchee bet it on Waung boy for race tomorrow. My hear that you have thousand dollah left and that you ask two-to-one odd'. Can bet?"

Delafield gaped at the man. A certain dignity marked his bearing. Certainly he was of a different stripe from the blue-robed Taoist mendicants the broker had seen, begging-bowl in hand, infesting the lanes of the Chinese city.

"Can bet?" repeated the Taoist.

"Yes, you're damned right: can bet!"

"Where my put money?" asked the Chinese. "Who keep?"

"The Manager of the Hongkong-Shanghai Bank is my stakeholder. I've deposited the thousand with him. His bank's closed, of course, but you can go to his home and leave your money there. He'll note the bet and give you a re-

ceipt. . . . By the way, how do *you* happen to have so much money? I thought you monks were as poor as Job's turkey!"

The Chinese looked puzzled. "'Job's turkee?' My no savvy. . . . Managah Honkong-Shanghai Bank? Velly good. Thank you. Goo'-bye." He bowed jerkily and left the doorway.

Delafield gave a jubilant laugh. He was ready for the race; every penny was down. But, to make sure, he gave the Taoist time to reach the stakeholder's house, and then 'phoned.

"Yes, the fellow was just here," came the bank manager's answer. 'Brought a certified check for two thousand. . . . I've been totalling up your wagers. You're plunging pretty heavily on this, aren't you?"

"I suppose so. But I believe that my man can win."

"Well, it's none of my affair," the banker said quickly.

It was with a new thoughtfulness that Delafield hung up. Canny gamblers, the Chinese. At the spring and autumn races, they had a miraculous way of discovering in advance which was the fastest pony. . . . Such a large sum, coming from a Taoist monk of all persons, and at the last moment! Could it be that Weeks was planning to double-cross him? . . .

Delafield began to pace the floor. Then he broke off, went to the telephone and called Sandy.

WHEN Sandy appeared a few moments later, Delafield scowled truculently at him. The broker's face was tinted that hot dangerous purple of the deeply stirred man with apoplectic tendencies.

"I want a straight answer from you! What's this about the Chinese plunging at the last moment on your runner?"

Sandy stared at the broker, genuinely surprised. "That's news to me, sir."

Delafield then told of the Taoist's visit. Sandy shook his head and then spoke:

"I've brought my boy Waung over with me, as I promised. He's downstairs now. Have him come up. Tell him just what you want him to do, and he'll do it."

Delafield's flush faded slightly. "All right, then, let's have Waung in. We'll give him the works. Believe me, I'm not in any mood for nonsense."

A moment later, Waung was blinking at the foreign magnificence of the broker's study, quite unlike the monastic bareness of Sandy's domicile. A portrait of an Occidental woman in a state of extreme undress and a nude statue on a pedestal struck Waung as being highly immoral. But he turned an ingenuous face to the two men and gave a placative, coolie smile.

Delafield spoke, his voice grating: "Boy, we don't want you to win the race, tomorrow. Do you understand?"

Waung smiled more broadly. "No makee fun of me, Mastah. Ey-yah! My run fast tomorrow! Run hard! Win race!"

"You're going to run fast, yes—but you're *not* going to win. You savvy that bend in the road, not far from the end?"

Waung nodded bewilderedly.

"That's the spot where you're going to slip and twist your cart in a patch of mud. You're going to fall. You will get up slowly and then limp after Han——"

"Wait a moment, sir!" Sandy interposed. "We've got to be careful, or we'll give the show away. When Waung gets up, it would be better for him to light out after Han—as fast as he could go. We can't have the race called off—and that finish judge of ours would do it like a shot if he got the least suspicion that it was

ribbed. . . . I've put a stop-watch on myself, falling down and getting up. And"—Sandy stared dourly at Delafield—"I think I've bruised my breastbone, doing it. The fall should give Han a fifty-foot lead——"

"But that too much, Mastah!" Waung broke in excitedly. "My no can catch up! Lose race!"

"Which is exactly what we have planned," said Delafield coldly.

The broker reached in the drawer of his desk and pulled out a shiny nickel-plated revolver of small caliber. Sandy gave a startled movement. His lips parted, but he said nothing. Delafield went on in that same cold tone:

"Boy, see this? I'm going to be carrying this, tomorrow. I'll be waiting at that bend in the road. If you don't fall down at that spot—you'll get a nice assortment of lead pumped into you. Now, do you savvy?"

Waung gave his master a reproachful stare but, gaining no consolation from Sandy's expression, he turned dispiritedly to Delafield. "Yes, my savvy."

**R**UNNING with that magnificent, tireless stride, Waung bore his thin, mournful-eyed master home from Delafield's. Once Sandy bent forward in the rickshaw. Waung slowed his pace to listen, for he knew it was the habit of those he carried to shift their positions just before speaking. But Sandy leaned back, muttering:

"No. Nothing, boy. Guess I won't say it. Except to tell you that this is a pretty rough deal we're handing you."

When they arrived at Sandy's house, the sports promoter shambled in, without as much as a backward glance. Waung put away the cart, turned and trotted down a side alley in the direction of his own home. . . . Waiting there for him would



be his aged father, blind, toothless, but still able of tongue and of whom Waung stood in filial fear. Also, his mother, who occasionally beat him for his soul's good. A wife. Three noisy children—and a fourth imminent.

As Waung turned the final corner, a man stepped from the shadow of a wall and stopped him. He wore the garb of a Taoist monk but of finer cloth than was generally seen on the shoulders of those who actively seek the Eternal Tao, the Way.

"Where may this person talk with you—alone?"

"This humble one would think it an honor to offer you the hospitality of his home. But you ask to be alone; and my beggarly hovel holds many persons. . . . Wait. . . . We can go to the shop of Bao-hing, the coffin-maker. He will lend us his workroom."

"Then let us go there."

Old Bao-hing, scenting possible customers, cordially bowed them into his shop with its coffins of catalpa wood in various stages of construction. Then he bowed himself out.

The Taoist monk began: "Waung, you may remember me? I gave you a prayer as an amulet, a charm against evil?"

"Ey-yah! I do remember. It was just after I had won that race."

The monk went on: "I am the unworthy head of the Taoist Order in this city. I have heard that your employer, Weeks, has placed a thousand dollars on Han for tomorrow's race. I have known for several days that Delafield has wagered heavily on his own coolie—but that, I thought, was a rather foolish loyalty to his runner. Delafield is no judge of an athlete, while your employer is said to be a good judge. I do not understand why Weeks is betting against *you*, his own runner."

O. S.—8

Waung hung his head. In a tone increasingly stern, the Taoist went on:

"I have just placed two thousand dollars on you. This money is risked by poor men—small amounts from rickshaw coolies, barrow coolies, lightermen, from the men of the junks and sampans. In my hands this sum was placed—because they trusted me." He gave Waung a searching look and then asked abruptly: "Are you going to win? Or is the race decided in advance?"

Waung was silent. He had a vivid desire to tell of the way he had been trapped, of the threat against his life. But he withheld the story, deterred by an ingrained coolie caution. He began to pace up and down the dim, candle-lighted room, threading his way between piles of lumber and half-built coffins. . . . Slowly a resolve formed in his mind. . . .

He turned back to the Taoist who had remained motionless but keen-eyed, and said quietly:

"Prior-born, return to your temple. Trust me. I shall do my utmost. Let me warn you that you will see a strange thing happen. But do not lose your faith in me."

"Will you swear that you will win?" the monk asked sternly. "Swear it by the three divided ghosts of your ancestors? And if you fail, are you ready to suffer the punishment of the Ten Courts of Hell?"

Waung gave the monk an appalled stare. The Ten Courts of Hell! He had seen the plaster effigies of those who suffered punishment in the Taoist inferno. The souls of those who broke faith—mangled by maroon-visaged demons; tortured by the slicing death; stretched on the rack; their eyes gouged out; tongues torn from their mouths. . . .

He was suddenly a prey to apprehension, a fear that caught at his heart and made his hands tremble. Could he win?

If he ran straight, ran hard, and did not fall—he would face the bullets of that gross foreigner, Delafield. After he was dead, the monk could not blame him too much. After he was dead. . . . But if he were shot, he would lose the race and the Taoist would lose the poor men's money. . . . If he died, he would be faithless and suffer the torments of hell. . . .

If he died! Who then would protect the living: his wife, his parents, his children, from the devils that harried them, the Taoist demons of coughs and colds, of trachomatous eyes or pains in the joints of the elderly?

"Do you promise?" the monk repeated. "Do you promise to win—or suffer the punishment of hell?"

Waung answered slowly: "I promise."

**T**HE day of the race was cloudy, with rapid rain squalls. Sandy choked the alarm clock which he had set for three a. m. and lay awake for a moment listening to a shower. He would not have to go forth at such an unhallowed hour to pour water at the bend in the road.

The general sogginess of the atmosphere, however, did not prevent a record crowd of spectators from assembling later for the event. The course was thronged with Chinese, wedged three-deep along the way—testifying to their vital interest in the race, since rain storms have been known to scatter Chinese armies in battle. The start and the finish were jammed with foreigners who calmly placed themselves in front of patient Orientals who had taken their stations at dawn.

Sandy had thoughtfully spread the rumor that this was to be a grudge race. Delafield carried on the farce, glowering and refusing to speak to Sandy when the two met face to face. The broker announced loudly that he was going to sta-

tion himself down the course, to see that Waung did not barge into his Han at the bend. As though accidentally, he touched the slightly bulging pocket of his overcoat and gave Waung a quick, meaning glance.

Waung caught the gesture and the look. The foreigner was not going to have any mercy! Waung did not for a moment question that Delafield would shoot if he failed to fall. Nor did he consider the unpleasant consequences for the broker as a result of such shooting. Waung's reasoning was purely Chinese. Justice was on the side of the man with money—and Delafield was rich. Could not a rich man always buy his freedom in a Chinese court of law? The life of a rickshaw puller was not an expensive commodity. . . .

The starter tapped Waung's shoulder and he crouched low between the shafts of his rice-laden cart.

"Go!"

Waung jerked his cart free of the wet clinging road, took a dozen careful steps and then settled into racing speed. The course was slippery but he began to run recklessly. His mind kept urging him to faster and faster spurts. The ominous words of the Taoist monk rang and echoed in his ears. He could feel himself actually being pursued by those maroon-faced devils. Demons ready to mangle the hapless soul who had failed in its trust. He dared not look back to locate Han, lest he find, instead, those fiends, their bird claws reaching out to grasp him, to bring him to eternal punishment.

Not far ahead now was the bend in the road, where he must fall—or go on until his back was riddled by Delafield's bullets. Then he heard Han's footsteps, not more than ten paces back. In sudden panic, Waung realized that Han was moving faster than he had done in the first race. Those thick legs were stand-

ing Han in good stead, now that the road was muddy and the traction heavier.

Already Waung could see Delafield at the bend, hand thrust in an overcoat pocket. Waung could almost distinguish the sharp projection from that pocket, the barrel from which hot lead would pour—robbing him of life if he failed to fall.

His legs felt weary; his troubled mind was robbing his body of strength. . . . Here was the bend. No difficulty in picking a puddle; the turn was covered with water. . . .

Waung pounded into the miniature pond. He actually slipped, then mechanically he checked the rickshaw from overrunning him. But, instead of regaining his equilibrium, he allowed himself to lurch to one side and to fall. He felt the impact of cool water on his hot cheeks.

He struggled to his feet, then with a savage tug at his cart he splashed forward, grunting, spendthrift of energy.

Ahead—far ahead now—was Han, pounding on surefootedly. To Waung's ears came a babble of Chinese cries: of horror or commiseration. The weight of his cart seemed tremendous, as though it were burdened with ten times the rice that it held. Would it never cease to drag on his loins and arms? Water dripped from his coarse black hair into his eyes, blinding him; he had to waste a precious second, wiping it away. . . .

Then he felt his left ankle oddly tingling. He had twisted it in his fall. With every step the pain increased, but he refused to heed it. . . . At last the rickshaw ceased to be a dragging burden and he could sprint again. Straining, he increased his stride, making wider and wider steps. Dangerous in this mud, but he must risk it.

The back of Han's rickshaw was nearer—yet the finish line was in sight. Ahead was a blurred mass of men, huddled in

the rain, who gave forth a sustained roaring clamor.

The pain in his ankle was growing almost unbearable but he felt queerly glad of it. The throb was like the lash of a whip, keeping his mind from focusing too intently upon those appalling demons. . . . Could he possibly increase the killing pace he had set for himself? He must!

WAUNG lifted his eyes an instant from the ground just ahead. Clearly now he could see the faces at the finish line. Han's rickshaw was still in the lead, hugging the outer rim of the road. The footage was rougher there; that would help a little. If only Han's lead were not so great! Too much, too much for any runner! But those demons of the thronged courts of Hell were pitilessly reaching up for him. Their bird talons were dripping with blood. . . . Could he lengthen his terrific stride even more?

A pulse beat cruelly in his temples and bands were pressing against his lungs. . . . Longer strides! . . . Must make them longer! . . . His feet slithered in the mud. Mad to take such a pace on a wet road—shouted all the caution in him, learned from the years of his calling. Mad—but not so mad as to let himself be captured by those maroon-faced demons! . . . His cart swayed. The spectators shouted a warning. He righted it without losing an ounce of momentum. He did not know where Han was, now, and he dared not look up to see. Every atom in him was calling for a final spurt, a last burst of speed. . . .

Suddenly the face of the finish judge drifted past him. The man was shouting. Waung was in the midst of a crowd of foreigners who caught at his rickshaw shafts. What new torture was this? Why wouldn't they let him go? Perhaps



he had been shot! At that bend in the road! And these were the demons beginning to make him suffer because he had failed to win!

He struggled to make his way through them, then vigorous arms were about him. A white man's visage loomed before his blurred eyes and he heard the words:

"Easy, boy! All through! You've finished! *Hao*—good! Greatest race that was ever run in Shanghai! Edged in by a foot—but you did it. You won!"

Everything swirled before Waung. A shower of sparks. Blackness. Finally he grew aware that some one was pouring down his throat the foreign version of triple-distilled rice wine, a pungent fluid. His eyes opened and he flinched as though menaced by a whip; for, bending over him, flask in hand, was Sandy.

The sports promoter was smiling dimly and his eyes were noticeably less mournful. He whispered:

"Good boy, Waung! I knew you could do it, even with a handicap. Although you had me scared." Then, as Waung was about to speak, Sandy shook his head warningly.

A half-hour later, in a dilapidated taxicab, with Waung seated fraternally at his side, Sandy allowed a trace of excitement to creep into his dismal voice.

"Waung, I had over five thousand dollars up on you. Every copper I could borrow."

"Then I do right, Mastah, to win, when you tell me not to win?" Waung put the question dazedly. "When you bet on Han?"

"That money I had on Han was just a blind. I've done some things in my life that I'm not very proud of, but I've never yet gone back on my own man. It isn't only the money; Delafield was due for a trimming and he got it! I figured out the race and believed that you could make it, even with that spill at the bend. What I didn't take into account was the lost momentum of your rickshaw. That almost wrecked you. . . ."

Sandy's voice went on, going over the details of the race. Waung leaned back on the shabby cushions of the taxi. His ankle pained fiercely but, with Oriental stoicism, he ignored it. His mind was at peace. Now he could view without fear the prospect of the journey that he—in common with all mankind—must some day take. The journey to the Ten Courts of Hell, there to be judged by the ghostly magistrate. He would not be turned over for punishment to the maroon-faced demons. . . . A contented smile widened Waung's heavy, coolie lips.





"Through the silk, Talfa sensed the Black Adder's eyes upon her."

# The Black Adder

By DOROTHY QUICK

*A tale of India—Talfa, the dancing-girl, tries to thwart the burning passion of the Rajah*

**T**ALFA opened the casement window, and leaning out into the night, tried to see the garden below. It was a quiet, moonless night and she could distinguish nothing. Even the stars were veiled and a heavy impenetrable blue-blackness covered everything. But a soft wind carried the scent of the jasmines to her nostrils.

She knew the garden so well that she could visualize it mentally, although its beauties were hidden from her eyes. There was the crystal pool and beyond it the marble summer house, always cool and inviting. Inside, on the couch of crimson silk, Boud Ali waited. At the thought of him lying there, his slim, muscular body relaxed on the cushions

while the black curls of his hair lay loose about his handsome face, Talfa's heart beat faster and her breasts throbbed against the casement sill.

Boud Ali waited for her and her every nerve cried out for him, longed for the relief that only resting in his arms could give. So near he was, such a few short steps and she could feel his lips on hers. Heaven! And yet tonight it could not be!

Talfa shook her head and the two long braids of blue-black hair slipped over the window-ledge, stretching downward into the night. Talfa, like the Fairy Princess of old, had hair that waved softly about her piquant face and then fell rippling downward until it reached her knees. It was very thick and soft and she wore it in braids to keep it out of her way. Her deep brown eyes peered out into the night as though they were striving to see the lover who waited for her, and her red lips trembled a little with the sorrow that enveloped her because she could not go to him.

**J**UST two short weeks they had known each other. Only fourteen days ago she had danced before the Rajah and his guests. Among them had been Boud Ali. As she made the obscene movements that were meant to drive men mad, she had seen him and read desire in his black eyes—desire which had lit a flame in her own heart.

When the dance was over and she and the other dancing-girls lay exhausted on the mosaics of the floor, she had heard the Rajah's voice.

"Choose whom you will among the dancing-girls to be your companion for the night—save those who are virgin: they are for me alone."

Talfa had raised her head and through the clouds of smoke and incense she had seen Boud Ali start toward her. Willingly would she have stayed and given to him

all he asked, she who had never known the touch of man. But it was not to be so; for before he ever reached her side, the chief eunuch had caught her by the wrist and led her and two other girls back to the harem.

There slaves had bathed them with scented waters, dried their hair, and they had sought their couches. Only Talfa could not sleep. The black eyes of Boud Ali had haunted her and the heat of the night had been oppressive.

She remembered so well that she had drawn a soft silk mantle over her and stolen silently down to the garden. No guards were about. The garden walls were high and the Rajah unafraid of his women betraying him. They knew too well the penalty that would be theirs if they were caught. For his wives perhaps he kept a stricter watch; but of these Talfa knew nothing, she who had been bought for a concubine because of her beauty and her ability to dance.

For a year she had been in the palace and had never seen the Rajah except on the rare occasions when she was called upon to dance, as she had been tonight. But because she was a virgin, she never was allowed to stay for the aftermath of the feast. The Rajah was generous only with those who no longer tempted him. Talfa knew that some time he would send for her, and then—— But that night she had had no room in her thoughts for any one beyond Boud Ali.

She had gone down the tiny stairway like a ghost, past the sleeping eunuch, out into the cooling night; beyond the crystal pool she had sought the marble summer house. Here some day she would know the embraces of the Rajah when his eyes would rest upon her with desire. But for tonight she would dream of the young stranger.

As she entered the pavilion some one rose from the crimson couch and came



toward her with outstretched hands. In the glow of the moonlight she saw Boud Ali, and a crimson flush stained her slender young body under the silken robe.

Boud Ali spoke, and his voice was low and musical. "Truly the priest spoke well who said we know not the power of our own thoughts. Here have I lain for hours, willing that you should come to me, and so the desire of my life has been granted. You are here!"

Talfa took a step nearer to him. "But how did you come? The walls are far too high to climb."

His clear laugh rang through the scented night. "Nor did I climb! Gold brought me here—gold and a greedy slave, who opened a little-known door in that high wall, and has promised to do so yet again—and will, if you are kind."

The girl moved forward. "I saw you in the banquet hall," she began.

He moved toward her until they stood face to face. "Beloved," he said softly, "I, too, saw such beauty as I had never dreamed, and love was born in my heart. Smile at me, sweet one. Smile, and tell me that I ask not in vain."

Talfa looked deep into his eyes, and the corners of her mouth curved deliciously. With a sudden gesture of surrender, she stretched forth her hands.

The next second she was in his arms and her silken mantle lay unheeded on the floor.

Twice since then the marble summer house had sheltered their love. Gold had truly opened the way for Boud Ali, and Talfa thought little of the risk she ran. She merely waited until the women's house was wrapped in slumber before she stole down the tiny stairway. That death would be her portion if she were discovered, faded away before the magic of her lover's kiss. The fact that the death would be a slow, torturous one, not swift and merciful, she never let come into her

thoughts. The moment and Boud Ali were sufficient, and she felt that she would gladly pay any price for the joy of resting in his arms.

But tonight? Tonight her soul was full of terror, not for herself but for him! They had planned to meet, and her heart had been full of eager anticipation. Then only a few short moments ago word had been brought that the Rajah would visit the women's quarters and that the dancing-girls should be ready to amuse him.

**T**ALFA, on hearing the news, had prayed silently that his choice fall not on her when the dance was done. Then like a swift stah of horror had come the thought the Rajah would retire to the summer house with whomever he chose. That was the reason she had seen slaves working there today. They were cleaning and perfuming the pavilion for his use. And just at that time Boud Ali would be there waiting. Death would be his portion, and she could not save him. There was no way. The slave who let him into the garden was in the men's part of the palace; so even if she knew which slave it was, she had no way of reaching him. And she would not dare disclose her secret to any one who could send a message. Talfa, herself, could neither read nor write. Only fifteen years old, she had been educated solely to attract and interest the senses.

In sheer panic, she had left the other girls, who were chattering like a group of excited monkeys, and had sought this window overlooking the garden. Out there, not very far away, her lover was waiting. What was it he had said of the power of thought? Gods! If only her thoughts could warn him! But she had no faith in her powers of concentration. By all the Gods, there must be a way! Then out of the night and her own despair, an idea was born.

At their last meeting they had laughingly joked of "The Black Adder," a bandit who had been terrorizing the whole province of Tawnpore, so called because he struck quickly like the reptile, and his touch meant death; also because he was always robed in black with a silk hood over his face. No one had the slightest idea of his identity.

When Talfa had playfully refused one of his caresses, Boud Ali had cried, "Submit, or I will call on the Black Adder to make you. See reason, oh, light of my life!"

And then much later, after she had explained that she had refused only for the joy of giving in, they had spoken of the Black Adder again, and Boud Ali had told her some of the bandit's less gory exploits. Perhaps he would remember their conversation and under cover of a song about the Black Adder she could warn the man she loved. No one hearing would think aught, for the Black Adder's name was on every one's lips.

Of her own fate, should she be the chosen one, she had no time to think. Breathlessly she ran to fetch her lute, and quickly returned to her place by the window. She had little time. Soon she would be called for the ritual of bathing, perfuming and robing that always took place before the arrival of the Rajah.

**S**HE struck the first notes softly. Then the music grew louder, the strain that had been played the night she first saw Boud Ali. She leaned far out the window and threw her clear sweet voice out into the night.

"I, Talfa, sing a song of the Black Adder," she repeated over and over, then swung into her song:

"The Black Adder came to the palace of the King.  
Within were jewels for his welcoming.  
Only the dancing-girl knew waiting was death's sting;

The dancing-girl sang, go away, go away—  
The King comes merrily to me this day.  
Black Adder, Black Adder, do not dare to stay!  
Black Adder, Black Adder, creep into your hole,  
Another night brings another goal—  
Only tonight would you pay the toll!  
Black Adder——"

Her voice died away as she saw the chief eunuch standing beside her. He laughed a shrill, thin laugh that frayed the edge of her nerve.

"Little fool, to sit in the window and sing of the Black Adder when you should be staining your eyes with kohl to snare your lord with their beauty!"

Her lute fell forgotten on the floor as one tiny hand pressed against her heart as though to still its wild beating.

"Come, my pretty one," continued the chief eunuch, as he pulled one of her long braids. "By all the Gods, were I a man, you could make me captive by your hair alone!"

Unresisting, she followed him and passively gave herself into the hands of the women. The fatalism of her race had come to her aid. She had done her best. Now all rested upon the knees of the Gods.

**L**ATER that evening, robed in blue gauze that revealed more than it concealed, with her long hair flowing about her shoulders, she danced with the other girls before the Rajah. Automatically her body moved to the music. Her thoughts were far away, with Boud Ali—hoping.

Suddenly, as the dance brought her near to the couch where the Rajah was lying, she felt the long ends of her hair seized firmly. She stopped writhing and felt herself gently drawn toward the Rajah.

Presently she stood facing him. He held her hair in his firm hands, having pulled it over her shoulder. She felt his eyes pass over her. Somehow she knew fate was upon her and that she would be

the chosen one. Trembling, she heard his voice, "Bid the music stop, and send those other girls away." Then she felt his hands upon her, tearing away her robes.

"With hair like that you need no further covering. Come, dance for me, so; and when the dance is over, if you still please me—and fear not but that you will—you shall be honored with my love."

With a slight shudder she shook her hair over her, and of a truth it was more concealing than the blue gauze had been. "A Rajah has no love to give a dancing-girl," she cried, remembering she had only one life to lose.

The Rajah laughed, then his eyes looked into hers. "Perhaps—who knows?—even love! At any rate, tonight you shall be mine. I swear it! Now—dance."

The music started. Automatically Talfa began to move to its rhythm, and then she started to turn and twist in a series of wild convulsions. Another thought had come to her. Perhaps she could so madden and inflame his senses that he would take her here in this room where they were, and Boud Ali would not be discovered in the summer house, if her song had not been heard.

She danced with a furious abandon such as she had never believed herself capable of. If she had drunk of the most potent of aphrodisiacs she could have put no more into her dance.

At last the music came to an end with a loud crash of cymbals, and she fell exhausted at the Rajah's feet.

The Rajah detached the golden robe from his shoulders and threw it over her. Then he came and lifted her into his arms.

"I, myself, will carry you to the pavilion," he cried, his breath coming quickly, his eyes mad with lust.

Two slaves ran before with lighted torches, and the chief eunuch followed behind.

In his arms Talfa lay limply. Soon she would know, and she could hardly bear the suspense. One last effort she would make, for her love's sake. "My lord, why do we not stay here?"

The Rajah made no answer, only strode rapidly on.

Yet another effort she put forth. "Will you not send the men away?"

This time she met with success. "Have no fear. Tonight is yours alone, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, oh lovely one!"

Talfa almost laughed aloud. For her there would be no more tomorrows. When he discovered that another man had spoiled the fruit for him, she had no doubt what her fate would be, unless she could so madden him——

THEY had reached the pavilion door. The Rajah turned to the slaves. "Put the torches in place and then go—all of you—and come not near until the sun shines brightly from the heavens."

When he had been obeyed, he carried her over the threshold. No one was in the marble summer house!

"Praise to the Gods!" whispered Talfa, and the Rajah hearing, misunderstood, and crushed his lips on hers.

Finally he laid her on the crimson couch and drew away the golden robe. The crimson silk brought out the whiteness of her body. She looked like a living statue as she lay before him.

"Gods!" he cried, "but you are beautiful!" and he moved closer toward her.

All thoughts of submission fled from Talfa. Better death than the embraces of this man. Now that Boud Ali was safe, she was no longer afraid. She struggled frantically. A cruel gleam came into the Rajah's face, as he pressed her close and sought to force her to comply with his desires.

Just when from sheer exhaustion she could fight no more, she felt the Rajah's



arms loosen their hold, and wide-eyed beheld two hands dragging him to his feet.

Forgetful of herself, she looked up. "Gods!" she exclaimed. "The Black Adder!" For holding the Rajah's arms tightly behind his back was a man clothed in black from head to toe with a hood over his face that had slits for eyes and mouth.

The Rajah made a desperate struggle to free himself, but he had been caught off guard and was held by hands of iron.

"What do you want?" he cried finally.

Talfa covered herself with the golden robe before the Black Adder spoke. His voice was muffled by the silken hood, but there was strength in it.

"I had sought your life, oh, Rajah of Tawnpore—your life and your jewels. But even an 'Adder' can be merciful!"

"My guards will give you no mercy," threatened the Rajah in a voice from which he tried vainly to hide his fear.

The Black Adder laughed long and hard. "Think you I am named for nothing? Hidden in the bushes, I heard your order and I waited until the guards had surely gone. Not until the sun is high in the heavens will they come. The Rajah has spoken!"

The ruler of Tawnpore bowed his head. When he finally raised it, he spoke shakily, "Your price?"

The black head leaned over close to the Rajah's. Through the silk, Talfa sensed his eyes upon her and drew her robe closer together over her heaving bosoms.

"I have no price," said the Black Adder. "Yet once I will be merciful. Here, you!" he called to the girl, "tear silken strands from those curtains so that I can bind this man!"

Talfa obeyed silently.

"How dare you?" cried the Rajah.

"Better being bound than dead. I will

leave you here on yonder couch and your slaves will release you in the morning. Then you can tell them the Black Adder knows how to be kind."

The Rajah said nothing. Talfa brought the strip of silk to the bandit and under his direction helped to tie the Rajah's hands behind his back.

THE Black Adder stretched his arms. "I am afraid," he said softly, "I must rob you of your pearls; and the Ruby of Tawnpore, which I have long envied, will now be mine."

Swiftly he stripped the Rajah of his jewels, which in truth were worth a king's ransom. Working fast, he tied the ruler of Tawnpore securely and laid him on the couch. He bound his body fast about with the crimson silk; then he stuffed a gag into the ruler's mouth and made it fast.

As he finished, Talfa tried to steal toward the doorway and freedom, but swifter than the snake for whom he was named, the man caught her wrist. "Not so—you who are the brightest jewel of all, come with me!"

"No, no!" shrieked Talfa, as he lifted her in his arms. "Will you come quietly?" he snarled. "Or must I silence you, too?"

Talfa made a gesture of assent. "I have no choice," she whispered.

As he carried her out of the marble summer house that had given her such joy and such misery, Talfa reflected that perhaps it was better this way. At least she was free from the Rajah, and Boud Ali was safe. Perhaps when the Black Adder tired of her, he would set her free; or failing that, if she could find a knife—a strange sense of helplessness descended upon her.

She was conscious that the Black Adder carried her through a low doorway, for he stooped slightly. On the other side were men and horses. A man held

her while the bandit mounted an animal as black as himself. Then he leaned over and threw a dark cloak over the Rajah's golden one. She was then lifted up into his arms, and she heard him give the order to ride—and the company moved forth into the night.

They stopped only once, at the outer gates of the palace. Here a paper was given the guards, who let them pass at once. Talfa could see nothing, as the Black Adder had thrown part of the cloak over her head, but she could hear the rustle of the paper.

For a long time they rode furiously. Talfa lost track of time. The swift motion of the horse and the strength of the arms that held her were her last conscious recollections, as she sank into the deep sleep that only comes with exhaustion.

**I**T WAS light when she opened her eyes. Through the folds of the cloak she could see the sun's rays. She stirred a little.

"Beloved, I thought you would never open your eyes," a well-known voice vibrated in her ears.

Talfa sank back, thinking she dreamed. The cloak was pulled off. The sudden light after the darkness made her blink.

Presently her eyes became accustomed to the light, and she looked up at her captor.

"Boud Ali!" she cried, and touched his smooth face with her hand to see if he were real.

"My little love," he murmured. Then, bending over without slackening his horse's gait, he kissed her fiercely.

Presently they came back to earth. "But how?" asked Talfa. "Where is the Black Adder?"

Boud Ali's free hand dangled a bit of black silk before her eyes. "Here," he cried gayly. "I heard your song and knew the message you meant to convey. So I

sought out the Rajah and bade him farewell. He gave me a pass for myself and men. Then I gave a purse of gold to the slave for a key to the garden gate, ostensibly to bid a last farewell to you. After that I waited for the Rajah to bring you to me."

"Suppose he had chosen another?" breathed Talfa.

Her lover laughed. "He could not have, my beautiful! I had my men ready to overpower the guards, but when I heard them dismissed, I sent my men back to the horses, and waited. The rest you know."

"Where are we going?" Talfa asked; not that it mattered, now that she was in her lover's arms. Not even the fact that he was the Black Adder made any difference to her.

"To my home in the Hills. We are quite safe. The Rajah will never know you are Boud Ali's, and together we will find happiness."

"And wealth," added Talfa, remembering the Rajah's jewels. "Only, I shall be afraid when you are off on your expeditions."

"I shall never leave you, now that you are really mine," he promised.

Her laughter rang out like tinkling silver bells, "Then there is the end of the Black Adder!"

Boud Ali shrugged, "Why?"

"If you go forth no more——"

His own mirth drowned hers, "Oh foolish one, I but played a part for one night, and borrowed a name to gain my love. If I had taken you, the Rajah would have found us out and death would have been our lot. But for the Black Adder he will not look. For my part, I shall think kindly of the bandit that all so abuse."

"And I shall ever bless his name!" cried Talfa as she raised her lips for her lover's kiss.

# The Hidden Monster

By DAVID H. KELLER

*Strange are the ways of China, even when transported to this country—a detective story of Chinatown and the exploits of an amateur sleuth in the Temple of T'ien*

A NEW temple had been opened in Chinatown. In spite of its mystery and peculiarities, the worship of the new god was rapidly replacing the former modes of religion. The temples of Buddha, of Confucius, of Taoism were sadly neglected for the wonderful sacraments of the latest idol.

The temple was simply an old store, remodeled for the purpose. Furniture there was none. Altar there was none. There was simply an idol. It must have been a very old idol, for, while the name, Shang Ti, meant the Supreme Ruler, still, the features of the god, the body of it, showed a peculiar combination of human and reptilian features that marked it as belonging to the dawn age of anthropomorphic sculpture.

It was a Dragon God. But the head and the face were human, with a look of hatred and malignity that spoke unutterable woe for all those who failed to obey its commands. It sat on scaly haunches, the long tail coiled around its body and the legs outstretched, ready to spring forward and kill the traitor and unbeliever. But this was not all! The visible part of the god was not the real god. Within the body of the dragon another god lived, more terrible in his threat and mighty in his far-reaching rule. This inner god was the real one. This was the T'ien, the *Almighty Ruler* of the destinies of mankind.

Its image reposed in the belly of the larger god. What the image was, what manner of god, man or animal it represented or resembled was known only to

those worshippers who had dared to look in upon it. In speaking of this real god, this hidden idol, people used the most respectful and fantastic terms in public, while in private they referred to it as the Hidden Monster.

The worship of this inner god was most peculiar. Two priests sat on either side of the dragon and there took the votive offerings. This was not in flesh, fowl or the first fruits of the harvest, but in hard cash, gold, silver or honest paper money of the United States. This offering to the Inner God was carefully counted by the priests and then the worshipper was permitted to go on with his religious rites. With shoes and stockings off, he climbed over the tail and lower legs of the dragon and up the body till his head was on a level with an opening in the upper belly of the thing that was half man, half beast, and all god. Into this opening the head of the worshipper was thrust, and thus he obtained a view of the ancient god inside. While the head was thus swallowed by the larger god, the devotee supported himself by holding firmly with both hands to the outstretched arms of the dragon. There he remained till the period of prayer was over and then, withdrawing his head, he descended to the floor, made a final bow of reverence and walked out of the temple.

For many days a steady stream of Chinamen came to worship at this shrine. Rumors of the new divinity reached the police, the anthropologists, and scientists of the city. Several white men, who were



considered friends of Chinatown, asked for permission to visit the new temple for purposes of scientific study. In every case this permission was refused by the priests, and the students of Oriental religion had to be content with little pieces of hearsay, picked up here and there.

Professor Charles Quarley was one of these disappointed scientists. He even went so far as to call on the head of the police department. The chief heard his story and shook his head.

"That is against our policy. When it comes to religion, we feel that it is best to leave the Orientals alone. They do not like to have everybody musing around in their temples. It causes hard feelings, and they are hard enough to deal with as it is. There is no way that I can get you into that temple except by force, and that would be undoing the work of years."

"But, Chief," urged Quarley, "I have lived for years in China. I can dress so that I look like an Oriental myself. I know the language. There is nothing I love more than to 'go native' for a while."

"You play at it," sneered the officer. "Why not do something worth while? For example, there is a lot of opium coming into the city now and none of my men are able to find out how it is being done. We have discovered and stopped ninety-nine channels, but so far the hundredth one has blocked our efforts. You go and find out about it and then I will give you credit for being a real detective instead of just a little play-child."

Quarley looked him square in the face and then stuck out his hand.

"Let's shake on that. I have the time and the money. I am not only going to find your opium for you, but I am going to get into the temple."

The chief only laughed at him.

However, from that time the new tem-

ple was kept under the watchful eye of the detective department of the city. The chief even went so far as to make a list of the noted Chinamen who came to worship. He found that the temple was drawing devotees from Seattle, Los Angeles, Denver and even as far east as Chicago. It was apparently becoming a factor of national importance in the religious life of the American-Chinaman. It was doing something that had never been done before. It seemed to be fusing Oriental religions. Among the dozens who paid to worship at the shrine of the Hidden Monster were those who had formerly followed Taoism, Buddhism, Mazdaism and even Mohammed.

The chief was a routinist. He had been, in his youth, an original thinker, but age had destroyed much of his initiative. Had this temple been a restaurant, a shop, or a gambling joint, it would have been raided months before. The fact that it was a temple protected it. The chief gave orders that under no circumstance was the sacredness of the temple to be violated by any member of the police force. The new god, *T'ien*, was becoming too important to be insulted in any way by white men. Things were fairly quiet in Chinatown and the chief wanted them to stay that way.

QUARLEY lost no time following his conference with the chief. His collegiate training had taught him that the shortest distance between two points was a straight line. He wanted to go and see just what this new god looked like. The only way to do so was to go as a Chinaman. He believed that he could do this without discovery. He was an admirer of Burton and felt that if the Englishman could go into the Holy City without being detected, an American ought to be able to duplicate the performance to at least a slight degree.

After an intensive and nauseating diet of carrots to yellow his skin to the appropriate shade, he drifted into Chinatown as a desolate and opium-hungry laundryman, out of a job. It did not take him long to find at least a retail source of opium. All he needed was money, and that he had in spite of his apparent poverty. Disappearing for a few days, he came back with better clothes and more money and a greater craving for the food of the gods.

After several such disappearances Chinatown guessed the secret of Ming Foo. He was a killer. The Tongs at once entered into a spirited rivalry. Every secret society wanted him as a member. He finally selected and joined one of the more respectable types. Money came his way and he opened a store. After that he occasionally drifted into the new temple and worshipped the Hidden Monster. Quarley was having the time of his life.

Some months later the chief received a letter. It was short, yet it caused the head of the department a great deal of worry. It read:

Dear Chief:

There may be a riot in Chinatown at any time. When it happens, instruct your men to search all the dead for a white carnation under the cap. If found, take the body direct to your office. Keep constant watch around the new temple.

QUARLEY.

The chief had almost forgotten that there was a man by that name. Then he suddenly remembered both the man and the conversation. He called in his assistant.

"There is a fool amateur detective working on his own in Chinatown. I do not know what he is up to, but he thinks that he is going to raise hell. Read that letter and weep! At the same time we had better do as he says. Pass it around among the boys and put a few more men on duty down there."

FROM that time on, the temple of the God *T'ien* was under the most careful observation. There seemed to be nothing new. Just the usual line of patient Chinamen, waiting for their chance to worship. The next day the line grew longer, but was still, silent and patient. After that, however, there seemed to be a gradual development of excitement, for even the Oriental can become excited under certain circumstances. Little groups of Chinamen gathered on the corners near the temple, engaged in earnest conversation. Now and then an orator talked to them in low but excited tones. Night simply increased the number of irritable Orientals.

At six the next morning a mob of rabid Orientals rushed down the street and broke into the temple of *T'ien*. Shots were fired. The trouble might have been anticipated; at least there was some feeble resistance, but the mob swept everything before it. Windows were broken, doors torn from their hinges, and in a few minutes the Dragon God was out on the street and torn to pieces—a rather easy thing to do, since it was only made of papier-maché. The damage done, the mob tore on, evidently in pursuit of one of the priests. The other priest lay dead on the street, and near him was another Chinaman, his face covered with blood. The riot squad of policemen arrived just in time to see the last of the mob dash around the corner. The two dead men and the fragments of the once popular god littered the street.

Among the first to reach the dead was a Secret Service man. He looked at the priest and found he was hatless. But the other man's head was still fully clothed according to the best Oriental style. The detective took off the black cap, and there—was a white carnation.

He hailed a passing taxi, and called to one of the bulls, "Hey, Murphy! Take

that one Chink to the morgue. I am going to take charge of this other one. Orders of the chief. Sure! It's all right. You know me, Murphy. Jones of the Secret Service. Here, one of you take this stiff's feet and the other his hands and in he goes into the taxi and the blood all over the seat. Sure we will pay the bill for cleaning; and now, Charlie, my lad, step on the gas and beat it to headquarters."

FIFTEEN minutes later the body was carried into the chief's private office.

"Here is the man with the white carnation under his hat, Chief," announced the detective. "Dead as a dead rat."

"Sure enough dead?" asked the chief.

"You bet! Must have a dozen holes in him. Look at the floor."

"Well, push the rug over. We can clean the linoleum. I will have to identify him and then some of the boys can take him to the morgue. Write me a full report. I hear that they cleaned out the temple."

"They certainly did. Tore the old dragon to bits, killed one of the priests and are after the other—and this guy," he got popped off."

"Musta something gone wrong. Good-bye. On the way out, send John in."

The assistant came in at once.

"Lock the door, John," the chief ordered. "Do you know that stiff on the floor?"

"Just looks like a dead Chink to me."

"He is more than that, John. I have it all figured out. That is a smart white man who tried to find out something about the Chink's way of doing things, and when the time came they bumped him off. They knew he was white all the time, but they just waited till they were ready. That thing on the floor,

John, was once Professor Charles Quarley. Now he is just one hundred and fifty pounds of dead meat. Pity! I wish I knew just what he did, or tried to do."

At that the dead man sat up.

"Really want to know, Chief?"

The chief nearly swallowed his cigar.

"You! You! What are you doing? Play-acting?"

"Sure. I am not even scratched, but I thought it best that all my old friends should believe that Ming Foo was really dead."

The chief dropped in his chair. At last he was able to speak.

"John, take the professor in and help him wash up, and then we will listen to the story."

Five minutes later the professor sat across the table from the chief, while the assistant, notebook in hand, was taking down the high spots of the story.

"You look sure enough yellow," commented the chief.

"I know it. That comes from my diet of carrots. It is better than any dye because it will not wash off. Now there is not much to tell you. I did just what I told you I was going to: I 'went native.' For the last two months I have been Ming Foo, much-respected killer and Tong member and storekeeper in Chinatown. And no one suspected that I was a white man. I had a most unusual and interesting experience, especially the night I was initiated into the Tong. I became an opium addict—at least they thought so. And I went into the temple of *T'ien*. Went right in, all dressed in my best with a fine black silk cap on, and gave the priest my two hundred dollars and climbed right up and stuck my head in the hole and worshipped the god like all the rest of them."

"You did what?"

"I climbed up on the dragon and stuck my head in the hole so that I could look



inside the abdominal cavity of the dragon and see the real god inside."

"Well, go on! Whatinell did you see?"

"Don'r run your words together that way, Chief. Language is so much more effective when there is a distinct hiatus between the words. I saw nothing but a hand reach up and take my hat off. Yes, and then put it right back on again. Of course I was expecting it. My friends had intimated that this would happen. So then I climbed down and walked back to the shop. But I found out about the opium."

"You mean the way it was coming in?"

"Yes. I have one of the caps on now. Take a knife and rip it open. See the flat tin can under the lining? Looks like any other black silk hat, but there is the opium in the can. That is the way they were distributing it. Every Oriental wore a silk cap when he went to worship, but when the hats were changed he was richer by so much opium. All the time his hands were in plain sight. You could have watched the whole performance from the outside and never suspected that they were selling opium.

"After that I did a little real detective work. I found that they were receiving shipments of these black silk hats from Canton. I saw one of the shipments. It was all easier because I was a member of a Tong and had a reputation for being a killer. Anyway I found out when the next shipment was expected and I duplicated it in every detail, even to the tin can under the lining. Then when the ship arrived I did the old substitution trick, and at the present time the shipment of caps with the opium is in my apartment. The priests received their shipment and kept right on selling the caps, but there was just black mud in the tin cans. Naturally the worshippers of the Hidden Monster became fretful. Two hundred dollars is a big price to pay for

a black silk cap and a few ounces of black mud.

"They knew in Chinatown that I was a killer. And the Tong I belonged to stood for honesty in business. So when the dissatisfied customers came to us to talk matters over I was naturally selected to investigate the matter and stop the trade—in mud. Of course the priests did not understand about it. They might have thought their customers were irritated on account of the price they were charging. So I did a little propaganda work, and when the time came we just naturally wrecked the place and I died on the field of battle, covered with mercuriochrome that ran from a dozen broken bladders. I must admit that every one who saw me thought I was dead. You can do as you think best with the opium, Chief, but I think that you had better put a death notice in the papers in regard to Ming Foo."

The chief simply kept on looking at the professor. At last he managed to speak.

"I suppose you realize that you just had beginner's luck? The next time they will kill you. I have been hanging around Chinatown for years and I simply can not understand how you did it."

"It was the carrots, Chief. I certainly was thankful that I had eaten so many of them, especially the night I was initiated into the Tong."

"What about that night?"

"That is another story, Chief. Suppose you get me up to my apartment in some way, and on the same trip you can take charge of that opium. I am tired of being a Chinaman. I think I will enjoy being a white man for a while."

"But how about your expenses?" asked the chief. "You must have spent a lot of cash."

"I certainly did, but I had a wonderful holiday—that is, all except the carrots."

# A Battle Over the Tea-Cups

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

*Chinese guile wins a victory as two generals meet over the tea-cups during the war in Manchuria*

THE train was stopped just out of Mukden. Flying American and British flags hadn't done much good, though it was pretty certain that no harm would come to any one on the train. Word flew from compartment to compartment that the northern war lord, Wah Hsu-Liang, would presently board the train in search of some one. He was coming in person, to assure the foreign ladies and gentlemen that no harm would be done to any one on the train.

I was standing in the corridor, talking to a high-caste Chinese, who with a woman occupied the compartment next to mine, when the word went around.

"This is very annoying," I said. "Looking for some one, indeed!"

The Chinese smiled composedly and said, "There is no need for alarm, my dear sir. There will be only a short delay. You foreigners are constantly beset by visions of bloodshed. This is both very foolish and very bad for the nerves, as you must admit. We Chinese are like a big family, quarreling among ourselves, but we do not like bloodshed either, and refrain as much as possible from it. But shedding the blood of innocent foreigners is something we do avoid with all our hearts. Besides, be content, for even in the temporary absence of the Japanese guards who should be along the railroad, the war lord will be careful to shed no blood."

He paused to smile benignly at the woman, who was devilishly pretty for a Chinese, and who bowed her head a little and smiled back.

Then he continued. "And as for look-

ing for some one, I am convinced it is so. As a matter of fact, Mr. Shaw, I think General Wah is looking for me. He does not love humble Mr. Lu-Gen, and he has a great hatred for the Mandarin Ming, which personage I also deign to be on occasion."

His speech had the unpleasant effect of making me exceedingly conscious of danger. I knew enough of Manchurian politics to realize that the elusive Mandarin Ming had on more than one occasion blocked the policies of General Wah, while Mr. Lu-Gen had also done his bit against the war lord. There might indeed be blood shed in the compartment next to mine. It depended, perhaps, upon whom the war lord asked for.

"But aren't you in grave danger?" I asked.

"That is possible," he said without a flicker of emotion. "Yet, it is believed that so long as man still has his head, danger is in the distance; it moves close only after man becomes frightened and loses the faculty for thought."

Here he turned to the woman at his side and said in Chinese, "Go now to the dining-car and bring tea, for the general will presently discover me, and perhaps he will not object to taking tea with me."

I retired to my own compartment, leaving the door open in the hope that I might be able to hear what went on between the general and my traveling acquaintance.

PRESENTLY General Wah entered the car. He was a tall, heavy man, with long, drooping mustaches not very well cared for. Hostile newspapers described

him most often in a Chinese phrase meaning "big man with the small brain." His eyes, I saw as he stared insolently into my compartment, were hard and sharp. He withdrew in a moment, and paused before the adjoining compartment.

My acquaintance did not give the general time to speak. "I dare to believe you are looking for me, General," he said in rapid Chinese. "I am humble Lu-Gen."

The general made no direct reply. Instead he turned and shouted orders for guards to post themselves at each end of the car and suggested none too politely that no one might leave his compartment until the general left the car. Then he turned and went into the compartment, leaving the door wide open.

That was a lucky break, for not only could I hear very distinctly what was going on, but I could also see what action centered around the small reed table my neighbor had set up, due to the position of a mirror on the corridor wall opposite Lu-Gen's compartment. The woman had returned with tea, and went about placing the cups.

"There are matters I wish to speak to you about," said General Wah without preliminary.

"Quite so," replied Lu-Gen in a soft voice. "But I dare to hope that you will take tea with me before we discuss these matters?"

"Tea I will take," the war lord said bluntly, "but it is not necessary to defer our discussion. Perhaps it will not be long." His voice had an ominous note in it.

The woman promptly poured tea, and cut a lime fruit in two.

"These matters," suggested Lu-Gen calmly.

The war lord smiled grimly and said, "On the twenty-seventh of the month just past you withdrew my store of ammunition from the vicinity of Kirin."

"Because, had it been discovered by the Japanese moving upon Harbin, it would have been confiscated. The ammunition is in my hands, awaiting your pleasure."

Lu-Gen's reply somewhat disconcerted the general. Before he could continue, Lu-Gen took from his pocket a small lacquer box, from which he shook a white powder into his tea. "I am under the impression that the general does not like sweetening in his tea?" he said, a smile touching his lips.

"Quite right," said the general shortly. "To go on," he continued, "on the first of the present month, you arranged for a large body of my troops to be held over at the Tungsi junction, which made it impossible for me to surprise Chansin on the following day as I had planned."

"That was done because I had knowledge that Japanese would fight against you."

"But the Japanese were in the far north."

"Ostensibly. But remember that surface peace often hides danger. Many Japanese were hiding near Chansin, in wait. It is desirable for them that you be removed."

The general was not faring well, but he continued to hurl accusation after accusation at Lu-Gen, who parried them with great skill. Presently the general said, "Will you be so good as to sign an order releasing my ammunition and stores from the place where you have hidden them?"

Lu-Gen looked at him expressionlessly, and said, "And if I do not desire to sign?"

The general's reply came like a bolt from the sky. "Then I am afraid we must execute your son, whom we have the great honor to have as hostage ever since we took him from your secret house in Chinchow a week past, and we must execute him in the desired fashion. I will send you his limbs, and his ears, and his



tongue, and also if you wish, his eyes, for you to look upon."

Lu-Gen continued to look at the general meditatively. Abruptly he said, "I will sign. But be careful that other things do not interfere. You are being watched by the Japanese. It will probably go ill with you when it becomes known that you have stopped this train."

"On the contrary, I have Japanese permission. They foolishly hoped I would spill blood."

"You are wise, General Wah." Whereupon Lu-Gen wrote out the desired order.

At the same moment, the woman, undoubtedly at a sign from Lu-Gen, dropped the tea-pot, and in the instant that the general's head was turned, Lu-Gen dropped something into the general's cup of tea. It was clumsily done, and the general had seen it from the corner of his eye. The two Chinese faced each other over the tea-cups, the general's expression grim.

**L**U-GEN broke the tense silence. "Shall we drink, General?" he asked, bending courteously forward.

The general nodded curtly, and Lu-Gen lifted his cup to his lips.

"Stay," said the general crisply. "We drink together."

"If you will thus honor me."

"And I will drink the cup you have prepared for yourself, and you will drink that you have prepared for me."

Lu-Gen raised his eyebrows in astonishment. Then immediately an expression of pain crossed his face. In a low voice, he said, "My ancestors writhe in torment at your unvoiced accusation, General."

"You will drink with me as I have said," snapped the general.

Lu-Gen bowed. "Very well," he said gently, and took the cup from the general's hand, and the general took his.

Together they raised the cups and

drank the tea. Lu-Gen's face was white and strained, but the general was smiling, his white teeth gleaming from beneath his straggly mustache.

"And my son?" asked Lu-Gen weakly, sinking back with closed eyes.

"He will be sent safely home, as I have promised. It is not a custom of mine to break a promise—even if it is made to Lu-Gen, who will soon, I hope, be no longer my enemy." His inference was unmistakable.

Lu-Gen clutched spasmodically at his bosom. The general had risen and was staring down at him in satisfaction. "You have won another battle, General," said Lu-Gen in a low voice. "Allow me the honor of complimenting you."

The war lord smiled sardonically and left the compartment, pulling the door shut after him. In a little while the train began to move. What I had seen was like a melodrama. I kept my eyes fixed upon the closed door of the adjoining compartment, expecting something to happen. But nothing whatever happened; so I got up and knocked gently on the door.

"Can I be of any assistance?" I asked in Chinese.

**L**U-GEN himself threw open the door. He did not look as if he had just taken poison. Had I jumped to conclusions? He smiled broadly at the expression on my face and said, "Mr. Shaw appears surprised. I observed you watching and listening in the mirror before your own door, and hope you were sufficiently entertained by our unedifying conversation. It is not often that you see deadly enemies in friendly converse."

"But I thought . . . I saw you drop something in the general's cup——"

"Surely you did not dream that I was trying to poison him?"

"What else could I think?" I said lamely.

"True. The Occidental mind has fancies. I merely dropped sugar into the general's cup."

"And into your own?" I asked.

"A sleeping-powder," he said, smiling at my incredulity.

I smiled foolishly, and felt very incompetent. "And do you think he will release your son?" I asked.

"My son?" asked Lu-Gen, appearing surprised. Remembering abruptly, he replied, "Oh, you accept too much of the general's patter. My son is quite safe in Shanghai. The general, coming upon a youth resembling him and arrayed in his garments in my house in Chinchow, fool-

ishly took him to be my son. He is a big man, the general, but there is no room for thought. He jumps to conclusions, a faculty I have noticed also in you Americans."

He smiled at me, and began to close the door. As I turned away, he said, "But even he who jumps to conclusions may often strike the truth, though he follows not its devious paths. Some day soon we shall perhaps speak of the general in the past tense."

A day later, the Peiping papers announced that the war lord of the north, General Wah Hsu-Liang, had died in his sleep the night before.

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# Jungle Twilight

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

From teak and tamarind and palm  
The heavy sun goes down unseen;  
The jungle drowns in duskier green;  
And quickening perfumes vespertine  
Alone assail the sluggish calm.

Narcotic silence, opiate gloom:  
The painted parrakeets are gone,  
The gilded butterflies withdrawn;  
Nocturnal blossoms, weird and wan,  
Like phantom wings and faces bloom.

In the high trees the darkness grows,  
And, rising, overbrims the sky;  
Like a black serpent gliding by  
'Neath woven creepers covertly,  
Unknown and near, the river flows.

# Cobra Teeth

By M. SMALL

*A strange story of double-dealing, blackmail and murder  
in Shanghai*

ONLY the slimy, sluggish cobra in the window of the native medicine shop enjoyed the Shanghai midsummer heat. Ah Sam, the proprietor, lay in his long wicker chair drowsily, fanning his porky body, naked to the waist. He idly watched a buzzing fly on the dirty window. Had he known the danger that was approaching he would have shortened his midday rest. No customers would be abroad in such weather and anyhow Ah Sam's income did not depend upon casual buyers attracted to this lonely alley by the ugly hooded cobra in the sunlit window. His livelihood came from a dark business carried on with unscrupulous, fox-eyed, seafaring men of all races and of all colors. Not too much business, not too many accomplices; for imprisonment, ruinous fines, and sometimes even death was meted out to caught opium smugglers. Only the vindictive eyes of the old serpent had witnessed the huge sums that often changed hands in that dingy, cobwebby shop, and serpents, like dead men, tell no tales. Since all men venturing within had not been so wise as the crafty cobra, not a few had been dead men before they could get out of the dark, evil-smelling alleys of the Hongkew district of Shanghai.

Since Chinese medicine shops often displayed reptiles, scorpions, centipedes, gruesome arrangements of bones and preserved viscera in their windows to draw trade, so Ah Sam's cobra gave his place of business the desired tone of respectability and proclaimed to the authorities the legitimacy of his business.

Ah Sam aroused himself with a start as

a ricksha pulled up at the door. With fear in his heart he recognized the huge newcomer who kicked the ricksha coolie and lurched into the shop. He well knew his visitor's unsavory reputation—unsavory even in the underworld of Shanghai. He was the Eurasian known to the dens of the port cities as Jake. He was never in one city long enough to be caught but he never left any city without full pockets. Jake had inherited his size and his daring from his Portuguese sailor father and his slant, cunning eyes from his mother, who in her day had been a notorious singsong girl on the waterfront.

Before Jake spoke Ah Sam knew that the Eurasian had ferreted out some facts about him that would spell his ruin if he could not act quickly and thoroughly. He was aware of the powerful ring behind Jake which operated among Chinese merchants throughout Oriental ports. He remembered two of his friends they had ruined.

Ah Sam instantly became the smiling, suave Chinese merchant anxious to show and sell his wares. He pulled out a drawer containing bottles, jars, and packages of pungent herbs and queer animal concoctions:

"Master wantchee buy pills, wantchee look-see——?"

Jake did not allow him to finish but he pushed him roughly back and handed him a card on which three Chinese characters were written. These three characters were more feared by prosperous Chinese than the loss of their souls. They meant ruin or death and often both. Ah Sam's



expression did not change as he innocently replied:

"Ah Sam no savvy. What Master wantchee buy?"

Jake fixed his cruel, bloodshot eyes upon the Chinese until the merchant shrank back against the wall.

"You dirty yellow rat! You know what I came here for!" Jake looked around the tiny room with the one door and the one window occupied by the cobra. In the center of the room stood a rickety counter. On the counter were some tiny scales and a greasy abacus for reckoning accounts. A dusty cabinet held the extraordinary stock in trade. A string of dried herbs was festooned over the window; an infant's skull and a cat's skeleton glared at each other on the cabinet; over the counter hung a long, thick string of small animal vertebrae and reptile jawbones retaining an occasional fang. In spite of its weird equipment, it was a humble shop, but Jake knew far too much to be deceived by outward appearances.

The Eurasian was a man of little speech and he spoke only three words, but each of these rang out in the still, expectant air of the shop like three pistol shots: "*Ling Mei Chi!*" Then he laughed an unholy laugh and shook a fist in Ah Sam's face.

There was something so blood-curdling about Jake's mirth that the cobra in the window was disturbed. It swished a restless tail and flopped about in the narrow confines of its cage. Its glinting, menacing eyes became even more glowing and vindictive. At the words "*Ling Mei Chi!*" Ah Sam trembled and leaned against the wall. However, his mind was working fast and furiously. He had known Ling Mei Chi well. Ling had been a fabulously wealthy silk merchant of Hong-kong. Gradually and mysteriously he had lost his entire fortune and then he had been found cruelly and horribly slain across the bay at Kowloon.

JAKE watched the effect of his last three words on Ah Sam and was pleased. Then he leaned heavily on the wobbly counter and spoke two more in Chinese: "Five Thousand!"

Ah Sam thought of his accounts in the Bank of India and in the Bank of China. They were in strange contrast to this humble place of business. His pass-books were not kept here; they were in a modern safe in an office building near the Garden Bridge. A thick joint of bamboo—the Chinese cash register from the time of Yao and Shun—held a few stray coins, the week's income from the shop. While the shop receipts did not suggest affluence, the mansion on Tibet Road just back of the Race Course was pointed out to envious Chinese from the provinces as the residence of the great Cantonese broker, Wong Heung Kong. Here lived his old wife who had borne him only daughters—ugly creatures like their mother—and his young secondary wife. She was the mother of his idolized Pao Pei that he had waited so long for. Ah Sam thought of his four-year-old son, affectionately nicknamed "Little Circus." He must act wisely and quickly if he were to save himself and Little Circus from ruin. He picked up the bamboo money-container and shook it:

"All Ah Sam hab got. Master makee mistake. Maybe he wantchee other man."

Jake leaned more heavily on the counter as he reached for his hip-pocket. Ah Sam stepped back and the counter swayed. The halfbreed regained his balance. This time he did not speak but he reached over and drew a cold, damp finger slowly across Ah Sam's throat.

The Chinese knew his danger and he paled beneath his yellow skin. He would not be the first man put out by Jake's gang after parting with huge sums of hush money. Loss of business, loss of home, loss of reputation, separation from

Little Circus. Men had even faced the firing squad or knelt before the beheading-sword for such crimes as his. He had more than once seen the ghastly results on the execution ground. He tried again as he stalled for time:

"Poor medicine shop Ah Sam no hab got five thousan' dollar." He again shook the bamboo joint. Ah Sam well knew that Jake's blackmailing funds never came from primitive bamboo money-containers. They came rather from the marts, where men talk in tens of thousands and not in brass cash.

Jake wasted not one word in reply, but he towered threateningly over the merchant. Ah Sam glanced at the string of bones and fangs now directly over Jake's head. With no further loss of time he reluctantly opened a pouch on his girdle. He pulled out a roll of bills and began to count slowly and sadly in Chinese. Jake's wary eyes were upon his every move.

"Ten—twenty—forty-five—fifty—seventy-five—eighty-five—ninety-five—ninety-six." He kept the money well out of reach of Jake's greedy hand.

"Ninety-six dollar hab got this side, Master."

The old cobra, disturbed from his siesta, thrashed about in his window. A cobra's siesta can not be interrupted with impunity. Jake cast an uneasy glance in its direction and leaned further over the rickety counter. The room was far too small for a blackmailer, an opium smuggler and a serpent. The Eurasian was anxious to get his money and be out of that slimy, creepy atmosphere. The string of reptile fangs touched his forehead and he shrank from their clamminess. Ah Sam was quick to see his tormenter's uneasiness.

"Maskee, old snake teeth all same fashion one piece stone. No can hurt," Ah Sam glibly lied as he stepped further back with the roll of bank notes.

Jake's greed for the money in sight made him soon lose interest in snakes and their accessories. He demanded the money vehemently and profanely. The Chinese rapidly estimated distances. Then he pretended to hand over the cash but snatched it back as the halfbreed made a grab for it. The counter toppled and Jake would have fallen with it had it not been for the string of animal bones above his head. The cord was strong and Jake righted himself. In one hand he held the ninety-six dollars and in the other were two drops of blood from two tiny punctures. The latter he wiped unconcernedly on his trousers, the former he anxiously counted to be sure there were no discountable notes in the roll.

The shopkeeper spoke with the solicitude of a host and the fine courtesy of the East:

"Velly velly solly, Master. Counter hab got old age."

Ah Sam no longer shrank against the wall. He was expansive. He was magnanimous. He was jubilant. He had saved his sizable bank account, his flourishing business, his good reputation and his sleek skin.

Jake did not look up from his examination of the bank notes. It would be an easy matter now to keep on bleeding his victim. The small sum of ninety-six dollars had only whetted Jake's appetite for more. This time he spoke three words and returned to his counting:

"Five Thousand! Quick!"

Ah Sam was all affability. "Can-do, can-do, Master." He cheerfully acquiesced as he put on his cotton jacket.

The Eurasian was too busy with his money to hear Ah Sam slip out of the door and snap the latch from the outside.

The merchant was very happy as he trudged along the blistering Shanghai streets. Cobra fangs he well knew re-

tained their venom indefinitely. He knew, too, that the poison was quick to act, for he had tried out one of these fangs on a stray cur last week. He had laughed long over its sufferings and contortions. He was certain Jake would attempt no escape through the live cobra's window, and the door and the lock were strong. Shanghai was in the middle of the "great heat," so he knew the alley would be deserted until late afternoon. The little matter of the latch could be fixed up easily before the police arrived.

Ah Sam was a kind, gentle man, so he gave the beggar at the back door of his office building a silver coin.

**W**HEN the pompous Wong Heung Kong later emerged from the front door of the same office building a shining limousine and liveried chauffeur were waiting to whisk him back to his mansion on Tibet Road, where he was due for a romp with Little Circus.

The next morning few residents of Shanghai were interested in the small paragraph at the end of the police reports:

An inquest will be held tomorrow before His Majesty's Coroner over the body of Jake Gonzales, residence unknown. The body was found by the police early this morning in the shop of one Ah Sam in an alley of the Hongkew district. It appears that the deceased in attempting to rob the shop was bitten by the cobra in the window. Near the victim was found a roll of \$96.00 in foreign bank notes. There was every indication that the cobra had not only saved the poor shopkeeper a lifetime's savings but had also brought a notorious criminal to justice.



**STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912.**

Of Oriental Stories, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for April 1, 1932.

State of Illinois } ss.  
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, depose and says that he is the Business Manager of the Oriental Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Wm. R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

George M. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

George H. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

P. W. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is \_\_\_\_\_ (This information is required for daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,  
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 31st day of March, 1932. RICHARD S. GOULDEN,

[SEAL] Notary Public.

My commission expires May 3, 1934.





**D**O PIOUS Muhammadans drink? Some of our readers have found fault with Robert E. Howard's story, *Lord of Samarcand*, because Howard depicts Timur as indulging in wine to celebrate his defeat of the Turkish sultan, Bayazid. A letter from Francis X. Bell, of Chicago, says: "I like Robert E. Howard's historical tales very much, and find them fascinating. But he is wrong—dead wrong—in representing Tamerlane and other Moslem lords as drunkards. Baibars the Panther may indeed have drunk to excess, as he was heretical anyway. But Timur (Tamerlane) was an orthodox Moslem, and consequently never drank at all. Mr. Howard should know, if he has studied the history of Islam, that drinking alcoholic liquors is expressly forbidden by the Koran; and certainly neither Timur nor any other important Moslem touched liquor at all. Omar Khayyam was of course a heretic, and his poetry is disapproved by pious Moslems everywhere, who deplore his drunkenness."

Mr. Bell is absolutely correct when he says that drinking alcoholic liquor is forbidden by the Koran. But Tamerlane did drink to excess, and many other Muhammadan sultans did likewise. Mr. Howard was faithful to historical facts in his delineation of the lord of Samarcand and his bibulous propensities. In the year 1403 the king of Spain sent an embassy to the court of Tamerlane, and one of the ambassadors, named Clavijo, wrote at length of what he saw there. His observations upon the gluttony of the Tatar lords leave no doubt at all that they not only drank heavily, but that drunkenness was expected of them.

Clavijo writes: "In this garden Timur now ordered another feast to be prepared, to which we ambassadors were forthwith bidden, together with a great concourse of other guests: and here by order of his Highness wine was to be served abundantly and all should drink, since indeed it was to be partaken of by Timur himself on the present occasion. As we were now informed, none would dare ever to drink wine either publicly or in private unless by the especial order and license of Timur.

"It is the custom with the Tatars to drink their wine before eating, and they are wont to partake of it then so copiously and quaffing it at such frequent intervals that the men soon get very drunk. No feast, we were told, is considered a real festival unless the guests have drunk themselves sot. The attendants who serve them with drink kneel before the guests, and as soon as one cup of wine has been emptied another is presented. The whole of the service is to keep on giving cup after cup of wine to the guests: when one server is weary another taking his place and what he

has to see to is to fill and give. And you are not to think that one server can serve many guests, for he can at most serve two for keeping them duly supplied. To any who should not thus drink freely, he would be told that it must be held a despite he thus offers to his Highness Timur who is honoring him by his invitation. And the custom yet further is for the cups all to be presented brim full, and none may be returned except empty of all the wine. If any should remain, the cup is not received back, but must be taken again and the wine drunk to the dregs. They drink the cupful in one or maybe in two drafts, saying in the latter case it is to the good health of his Highness. But he by whom the wine is freely quaffed will say, 'By the head of his Highness,' and then the whole must be swallowed at a draft with not a drop to be left in the bottom of the cup. The man who drinks very freely and can swallow the most wine is by them called a Bahadur, which is a title and means one who is a valiant drinker. Further, he who refuses to drink must be made to drink, and this whether he will or no.

"On the day of which we are now speaking, Timur had sent to us one of his lords in waiting, who brought us as a gift from his Highness a great jar of wine, and the message was that he would have us drink some of this before coming to him, in order that when we should attend his presence we might be right merry. Hence thus we went to him, and he ordered us to be seated, and thereupon beginning to drink we sat so for a long space of time. . . . Both the garden and palace were very fine, and Timur appeared to be in excellent humor, drinking much wine and making all those of his guests present do the same."

A noteworthy example of drunkenness by a Muhammadan emperor is that of Baber, the first of the Mogul conquerors of India, and a lineal descendant of Tamerlane. Baber kept himself drunk with wine, hashish and poetry, until after he proclaimed the *jihad*, or holy war, against the Hindoos. He then gave up his wine-drinking, but continued to keep drunk on hashish and poetry.

Another interesting glutton in drinking and eating was Mahmud Bigarsha, who ruled over Gujarat for more than fifty years. He ate forty pounds of food every day; and when he went to bed at night he had a heaping plateful of rice on each side of him, so that if he awoke in the night he could eat the rice without turning over. He used to say that it was fortunate for him he was born to be a king, for otherwise whoever could have fed him? Yet he was a pious Moslem.

The more puritanical sects of Muhammadans, however, would not dream of touching liquor. One of the saints of Islam, in discussing drinking, outdid the most ardent of our American prohibitionists in his hatred of alcohol. "If one drop of wine fell into a well," he once said, "I would have the well filled up. And if fifty years thereafter some grass should grow in that spot, and some sheep should graze on that grass, I would have all the sheep killed and their carcasses destroyed as defiled."

A letter to the Souk from Jack Darrow, of Chicago, says: "I don't think I'll ever tire of reading stories by Robert E. Howard. Can't you manage to have one in each issue? Warren H. Miller is another good author of stories of the East. I enjoyed *Jungle Girl* immensely."

Writes Bruce Bryan, of Los Angeles: "I think the cover this time is the best yet, bold and with just enough restraint to make it truly art. I pick Howard's story as

(Please turn to page 428)

# Coming Next Issue

LAYLA was suddenly interrupted by a muffled scream from one of the slave-girls, who came hurrying across the room with my female clothing. "The master is coming!" she cried.

With the aid of the slave-girl and Layla I quickly donned the garments, then bent over my astrological table and began muttering calculations in the cracked voice of an old hag.

The door opened, and I saw a white-bearded *shaykh*, with a face like a dolphin's belly and a neck like an elephant's throat, advancing ponderously across the floor. Despite his change in appearance, there was no mistaking the flat nose and huge figure of the terrible Abu al Kurbaj.

"Perhaps your soothsayer will deign to read the future for me, Layla," he said. "What say you, mother?"

"With joy and gladness, my lord," I croaked.

The *shaykh* drew up an ottoman, and sitting down, observed me minutely.

"What large hands you have, mother," he said, presently, "and what enormous feet."

"I am as Allah made me," I replied, sensing danger.

"The ways of Allah are past all understanding," observed the *shaykh*. "Yet never before have I seen a woman with hands and feet like a man."

At this, I knew the time for shamming had passed. With a sudden leap, I clutched him by the bull throat, but I might, with equal success, have attempted to choke a hippopotamus.

He seized my wrists and flung me from him as if I were a child. "Ya, Mormous! Ya, Mahmet! To me!" he bellowed. Then two stalwart eunuchs burst into the room, bared blades in hand. . . .

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### WHAT BECAME OF ALADDIN'S LAMP

By Allan Govan

An entertaining story that begins where the *Arabian Nights* tale of Aladdin left off.

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Autumn Issue ORIENTAL STORIES Out October 15



(Continued from page 426)

first, *Java Madness* second, and *Scented Gardens* third. *Red Moons* was a fine story, but some of the philosophy seemed hard to read and at times quite irrelevant. The end, with all that business about the Khattaks, seemed slightly mixed."

"Brundage did a fine job in the cover illustration for the current ORIENTAL STORIES," writes Robert E. Howard. "I have only had time to read *Jungle Girl* so far. It is needless to praise Miller; his stories speak for themselves. I used to read his earlier work in the *American Boy*, and never dreamed that some day I'd have the honor of seeing my name in a magazine alongside his. I have only a single kick to make about *Jungle Girl* and that isn't to be taken as a criticism of the story's merit or the author's style. But Lord Bolton's end, while dramatic and gratifyingly gory, was a bit too sudden and painless to satisfy me. He was too ornery to deserve an easy finish. I'd like to have let him kick and howl a while with a tulwar through his lower abdomen."

E. H. Price writes from New Orleans: "*Lord of Samarcand* is Howard at his best again. While history gives another account of what happened at Otrar, he has deftly wrenched history to serve his plot, and has done it in his usual sweeping fashion and dramatic way. Aside from Harold Lamb's books, I have not seen *Tamerlane* so colorfully drawn. *Java Madness* by Joseph O. Kesselring is not a pretty story, but convincing, debunking the Indies. Good work. Good handling of a plot not easy to put across."

Readers, let us know what is your favorite story in this issue. And if there are any stories you dislike, let us know that too. Your letters will help us to fill the magazine with the kind of stories you like best. The most popular story in the spring issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *Lord of Samarcand*, Robert E. Howard's tale of *Tamerlane*.

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# THE SNARE

By ARREPH EL-KHOURY

*Hammad returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca, only to find himself mulcted of his money*

**B**EHIND the little desk in the office that overlooked the inner courtyard of the Inn of the Seven Simitars, Madam Azuri sat giving orders like a dowager sultana, while in the courtyard the dust was surging in overlapping clouds. The rabble was deafening, characteristically Arabian; for the place was filled with camels, mules, horses, donkeys, sheep, goats and men from the desert, men from the city, and villagers who cried and shouted boisterously.

As Madam Azuri gave orders and gossiped with her patrons, she smoked a rose-tinted water-pipe and methodically fanned herself with a beautiful Japanese fan. Occasionally she cast a glance into the courtyard and smiled through half-closed eyelids. Her glances below invariably sought out the man who squatted near the pond in the middle of the courtyard. Hammad, the man, was dressed in village attire. He had squatted there, heeding neither the filth nor the dust nor even the scorching rays of that typical tropical Arabian sun that beat on his head like crackling spears. He was beguiling himself by moving a bamboo wand from one hand to the other.

Madam Azuri noticed that he had remained in the same place for more than two hours. Several times she thought she would summon him and ask him a question or two, but each time a servant or a patron interrupted. Finally she was alone. She clapped her delicate hands and her *kbadima* [girl-servant] ran to her.

"Tell that man to come here," ordered Madam Azuri, pointing to Hammad, who

crouched near the pond like a meditating Buddha.

The *kbadima* ran, her bushy hair flying in the wind.

**I**T WAS not long till the *kbadima* returned, Hammad walking behind her with a shambling gait. He appeared fatigued and worried. His clothes were ragged, his eyes bloodshot, his face cadaverous. He stopped in front of the desk and stood indifferently, waiting for Madam Azuri to speak.

"What is troubling you, may I ask?" she demanded, smiling a little.

"Nothing!" replied Hammad dryly.

"Are you sick?"

"No."

"What made you sit in the same place for more than two hours?"

"Leave me to my misery!"

"I may help you!" Madam Azuri replied kindly.

Hammad shrugged his shoulders. After a moment of silence, he ventured: "I lost everything."

"What—your wife and house?"

"No! Thanks be to Allah the Lord of Mercy, I am not married."

"What then?"

"Everything I own in this world."

"Money?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Five hundred Turkish pounds in gold."

"How?"

Hammad told her that before going on a pilgrimage to Mecca he had left the



money with a certain man by the name of Aminullah, who was noted for his honesty and to whom the pilgrims brought their valuables for safekeeping. On his return from Mecca, however, Aminullah refused to give back the money. With no receipt of the contract, Hammad was jeered by the police and thrown out of Aminullah's house.

Madam Azuri looked at the poor and simple Hammad and began pulling into the snake of the water-pipe until the water bubbled like an ill-natured camel.

"Where does this Aminullah live?" she asked abruptly.

Hammad told her. She pondered a while, and then said, slowly and emphatically, "Why should you make pilgrimage to Mecca when your faith is so small that you admit defeat over a paltry five hundred pounds? If it were just, your money would be returned to you. No right can be usurped while its lawful owner is able to claim it. Pray on the Prophet Muhammad, the Lord of the Messengers, and in forty-five minutes return to Aminullah and demand your money as though it were your first request. Perhaps the Prophet—on him be peace—may move his heart with pity and he will remember your having left it with him. Go, and may Allah be with you."

Hammad nodded unwillingly.

A VEILED woman crossed the Street of the Standard-Bearer and entered that of the Pasha. She stopped at the second door to the left and knocked. It was not long until the door turned on its squeaking hinges. The woman was greeted by a man of middle height, who was richly dressed and wore a huge turban and gold spectacles, behind which a pair of beady eyes squinted malignantly. The man was Aminullah.

He led the way to a spacious hall spread with rich rugs, and inviting the

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woman to sit on the divan, he sat facing her.

"Can I be of any service to the lady?" he began.

"May Allah grant you a long age," said the woman, and tears came to her eyes. "My husband," she went on, "went on a pilgrimage to Mecca a year ago and has not yet returned nor even sent me a letter. I am worried and I am going to Mecca. I have brought this thousand pounds for you to keep for me." She drew a leather bag from under her coat and placed it in front of Aminullah.

Before Aminullah could speak a word, the door was flung open and Hammad walked into the room. He went directly to Aminullah, greeted him profusely, and kissed him twice on the forehead.

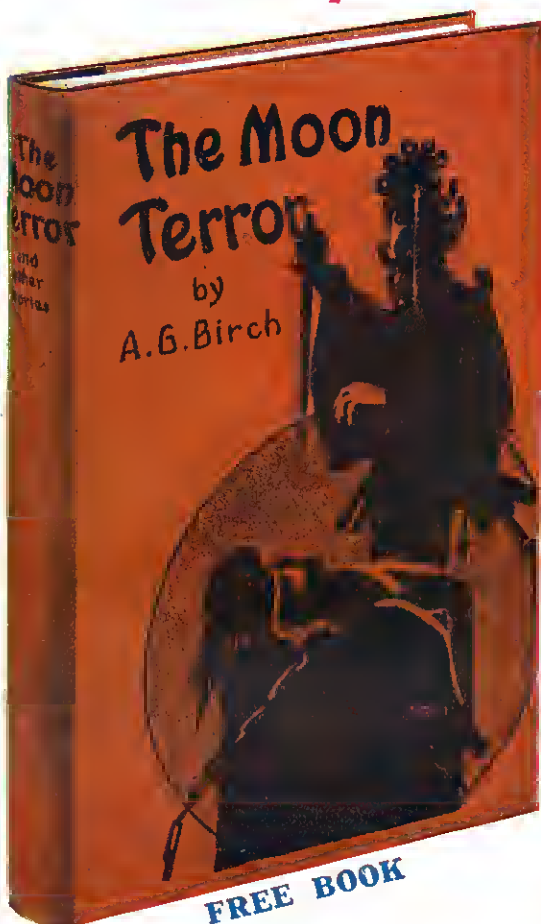
"I have just returned from Mecca," Hammad announced, addressing Aminullah. "If you please, let me have the five hundred Turkish pounds which I entrusted with you before I left."

Aminullah looked at Hammad, then at the veiled woman and the bag in front of him. "A thousand is better than five hundred," thought he, and walked to a table. From the drawer he took out a wooden box, opened it and produced Hammad's sack of gold and handed it to him.

Hammad's face glowed with a strange bewilderment. He clutched his sack of gold, and forgetting to thank Aminullah he ran toward the door. But before he reached it a girl-servant rushed in. She ran to the veiled woman and said: "The master has returned!" and threw herself on the veiled woman.

The veiled woman turned toward Aminullah. "In that case, of course, I shall not go to Mecca." She raised her veil to kiss the girl-servant who brought the happy tidings. Hammad looked over his shoulder, and there he discovered Madam Azuri.

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